

THE EVOLVING STRATEGIC LANDSCAPE

In President Barack H. Obama's first term, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM came to an end. By January 1, 2012, all American troops had been withdrawn from Iraq. The drawdown in Iraq permitted tens of thousands of additional U.S. personnel to deploy to Afghanistan in a surge of support for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. These forces did not have an immediate impact on the situation in Afghanistan because the White House, the Department of Defense (DOD), and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) were hesitant to commit them before identifying the best way to apply counterinsurgency lessons from Iraq to the Afghan campaign.

The Afghan surge differed from the Iraq surge in several ways. First, whereas the Iraq surge sought to secure the country against insurgent attacks, the Afghan surge did not aim to defeat the Taliban insurgency outright. Rather, the goal of the Afghan surge was to set conditions for turning over security responsibilities to Afghan forces. Second, the White House set an end date for the Afghan surge—September 2012—in the early stages of the campaign. Although this target provided a clear trajectory, it constrained U.S. involvement to a degree that had not been present in Iraq. Finally, whereas the drawdown in Iraq shifted the emphasis of U.S. military involvement overseas from one campaign to another, the end of the Afghan surge reduced the entire U.S. presence abroad as ISAF prepared to give the Afghans control of their own security.

The end of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM triggered a period of major change within the U.S. military. The Army, which had provided most of the equipment and personnel for both Afghanistan and Iraq, had received the bulk of DOD funding since 2001. As U.S. involvement in Iraq drew to a close, however, government spending would shift from defense to other programs. Even as the Army adapted to an evolving funding environment, it had to adjust to new strategic priorities. Although this reshuffling of priorities stemmed in part from U.S. government decisions, Russian adventurism and the chaotic dissolution of the Iraqi Army in the face of extremist attacks also resulted in American soldiers returning to Europe and Iraq.

USHERING IN OPERATION NEW DAWN

Between December 2008 and January 2012, the end of the surge in Iraq reshaped the structure of American military involvement in the region. The dispatching of five additional brigades to Iraq had permitted U.S.

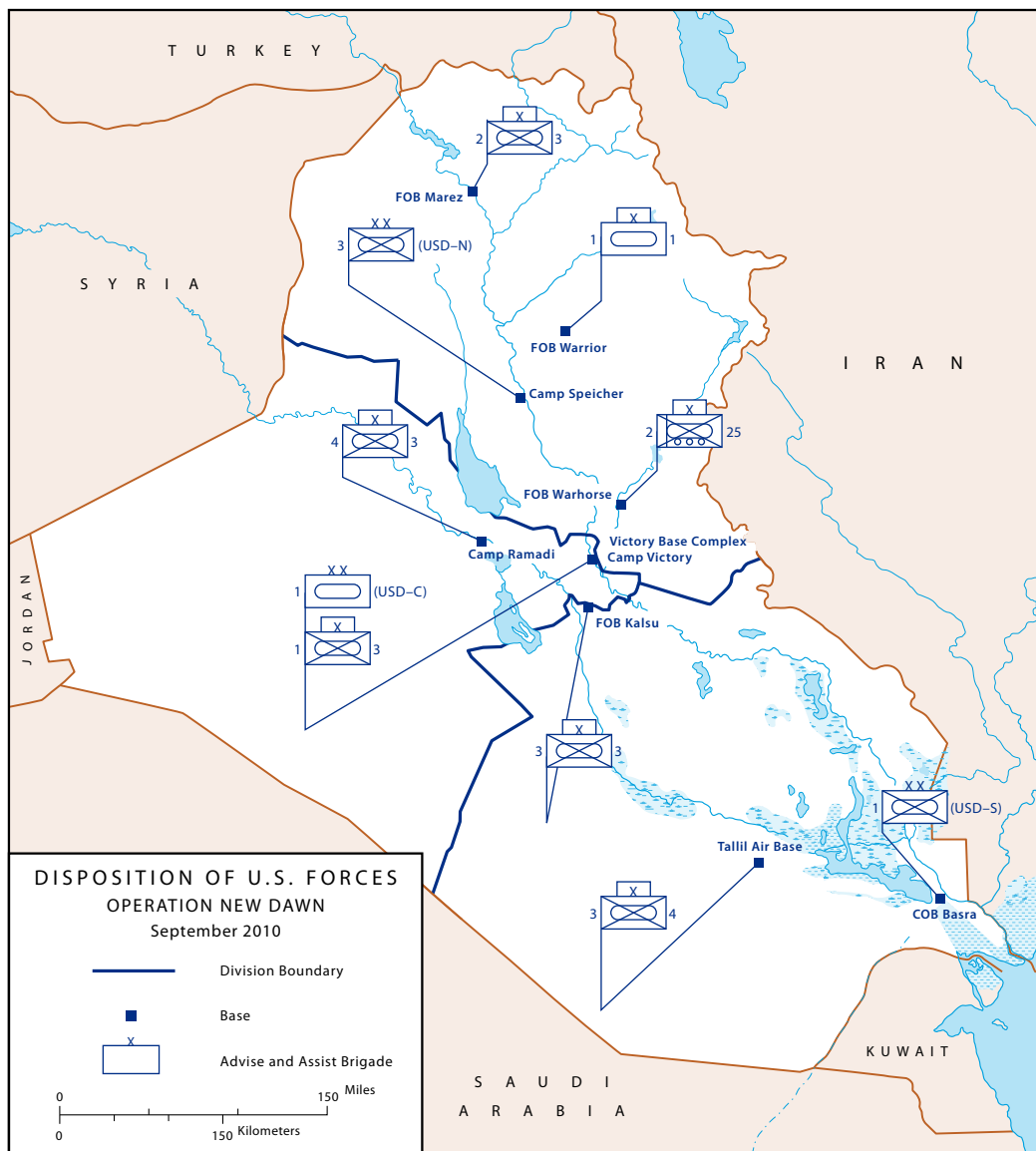
commanders to both safeguard the Iraqi population and mount sustained offensive operations against insurgent strongholds. As these strongholds fell, the resulting drop in insurgent-inspired violence not only averted a potential civil war but also established the conditions for a withdrawal of U.S. and coalition forces. With the Iraqi Army showing signs of growing competence, the Bush administration sought to turn over security responsibilities to Iraqi forces as it reduced the U.S. presence.

In 2008, major commands in Iraq consisted of the Multi-National Corps–Iraq headquarters and Multi-National Security Transition Command–Iraq, both of which answered to Multi-National Force–Iraq. All three headquarters were located at the Victory Base Complex, or Camp Victory, adjacent to Baghdad International Airport. Tactical elements included Multi-National Force–West in Al-Anbar Province, Multi-National Division–North in Mosul, and Multi-National Division–Baghdad. In addition, the Polish Multi-National Division–Central South and British Multi-National Division–Southeast were deployed to the south of Baghdad.

A Strategic Framework Agreement, signed by President Bush and Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki on December 14, 2008, laid out the path for a complete withdrawal of U.S. forces. Both leaders also signed a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) outlining the legal parameters under which American troops would operate in Iraq. Although both agreements were predicated on the departure of all U.S. forces by the end of 2011, the signatories reserved the option of renegotiating the original terms before that date. The drawdown began in January 2009 with the departure of the five brigades that had formed the main effort of the surge. As U.S. troop levels continued to decrease, units remaining in country received more advisory responsibilities and much larger areas of responsibility. Acknowledging the significance of these developments, on September 1, 2010, the DOD redesignated Operation IRAQI FREEDOM as Operation NEW DAWN. The name change marked the formal transition from a combat-oriented mission to a security force assistance focus (*Map 40*).

The concept of employing dedicated advisory units emerged after the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) theater reserve force, the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, deployed from Kuwait in December 2008 to replace the small British contingent remaining in Iraq's southern Basra Province. The situation in Basra posed a significant security force assistance challenge because the number of Iraqi forces had multiplied as the British presence shrank. Fortunately, the low levels of violence allowed the brigade to assign all of its subordinate units to mentoring Iraqi security forces. As a result, the 4th Brigade Combat Team partnered not only with the Iraqi Army's 10th Division, but also three provincial police forces, one national police brigade, and the Directorate of Border Enforcement's 11th Brigade.

Encouraged by the 1st Cavalry Division's initial successes, General Raymond T. Odierno, the commander of Multi-National Force–Iraq, spoke with Lt. Gen. Charles H. Jacoby Jr., commanding general of the I Corps (based in Fort Lewis, Washington), about dedicating entire brigades to advisory tasks. The I Corps would become the Multi-National Corps–Iraq in April 2009. Several months before the I Corps took over this position, Odierno and Jacoby agreed that the “advise and assist brigades” should focus on sustaining recent security gains, developing Iraqi security forces, and improving civil governance capabilities. As a result, the dedicated



Map 40

advisory brigades deploying during the I Corps' tour were augmented by civil affairs, rotary-wing aviation, military intelligence, military police, and explosive ordnance disposal assets.

The U.S. Army followed up the commanders' discussion by designating the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division—a heavy combat team based at Fort Bliss, Texas—as an advisory brigade prototype. The brigade's leadership learned about their new operational focus in January 2009. In anticipation of replacing their 1st Cavalry Division counterparts in southern Iraq, the brigade's subordinate elements received new responsibilities: its reconnaissance and surveillance squadron would mentor the Department of Border Enforcement, its field artillery battalion would support Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), and its tank and infantry battalions would mentor Iraqi army and police units.



Advise and assist brigade trainers working with Iraqi Army soldiers.

The 4th Brigade Combat Team soldiers who had served in Iraq before encountered a far different tactical environment when they returned. Soon after taking over as the Multi-National Corps–Iraq headquarters, General Jacoby’s I Corps had to remove U.S. forces from bases within major Iraqi cities by the end of June 2009. Although the December 2008 agreement outlined the handover process, American and Iraqi units interpreted its provisions differently. Some Iraqi commanders restricted U.S. movement outside of coalition bases, and these unexpected constraints upset a number of American commanders. Seeking to defuse tensions, the Iraqi minister of defense asked U.S. forces to maintain a low profile during the first week of

July to demonstrate to the Iraqi public that their own security forces had assumed the lead.

The next major change began in January 2010, when a new headquarters known as United States Force–Iraq absorbed the Multi-National Force–Iraq, the Multi-National Corps–Iraq, and the Multi-National Security Transition Command–Iraq. The major combat formations were similarly reorganized when three American divisions replaced the original five multinational divisions. United States Division–North assumed the responsibilities of Multi-National Division–North, and United States Division–Center replaced Multi-National Division–Baghdad and then absorbed Multi-National Force–West a few weeks later. Multi-National Division–South, which previously had absorbed Multi-National Divisions Southeast and Center–South, became United States Division–South in February 2010.

During the same time frame, the Iraqi political scene experienced comparable changes. On March 7, 2010, Iraqis voted in the second nationwide parliamentary elections held since the fall of Saddam Hussein. The elections for the 325-member parliament took place with little disruption as Iraqi security forces—with American troops conspicuously absent—provided security for 6,500 polling places. In the results released three weeks later, neither Prime Minister al-Maliki’s Dawa Party nor the opposing political coalition (the Iraqi National Movement, headed by former interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi) won the required 163-seat majority. Sunni Arab and Kurdish Iraqis wanted the existing Shia-dominated government replaced by a more inclusive arrangement. Although Allawi’s coalition had won the most parliamentary seats, Prime Minister al-Maliki refused to concede, and pressured an Iraqi judge to allow his party, which had won the second-largest number of seats, to form a government.

Even after the new parliament was seated on June 14, 2010, political negotiations continued for months as al-Maliki fought to remain in power. In a bid to end the postelection paralysis, the United States brokered a power-sharing agreement, allowing al-Maliki to stay in office as prime

minister while Allawi's coalition received control of all key ministries. The success of the arrangement, however, depended on continuous coordination between Washington and Baghdad. When that arrangement broke down, al-Maliki began dispatching special operations units to harass and arrest potential rivals. He also implemented measures to ensure the loyalty of the Iraqi Army, such as appointing political allies as division commanders and replacing Kurdish personnel in three divisions in the northern part of the country with Shia Arabs.

Tense negotiations between the United States and Iraq over a permanent SOFA revealed that the strategic interests of both nations had diverged. Most ordinary Iraqis did not favor a long-term U.S. presence. Although Sunnis, Kurds, and some moderate Shias trusted the coalition, none of the major political factions would openly support an agreement along the lines proposed by the U.S. government. President Obama faced similar pressure from his domestic political base to bring the war to an end. When questions about legal immunities for U.S. troops arose during negotiations for a permanent SOFA, the United States and Iraq could not reconcile their respective positions. Unable to break the stalemate, both nations permitted the existing temporary arrangements to lapse rather than sign a permanent agreement. The failure to reach an accord set the stage for a complete American withdrawal.

The 25th Infantry Division's deployment to Iraq in December 2010 heralded the drawdown's next stage, which began with U.S. Division–Center assuming the responsibilities of the departing U.S. Division–North and U.S. Division–South. The U.S. and Iraqi governments' failure to reach a compromise on the SOFA by early fall 2011 put into motion plans to withdraw the remaining U.S. military personnel from Iraq. As the sole headquarters in Iraq, U.S. Division–Center managed the retrograde movement involving 43,000 military personnel and 53,000 DOD contractors. In addition to overseeing that task, which included transferring twelve major bases to Iraqi security forces, the 25th Infantry Division handed over its responsibilities to 17,000 State Department personnel and contractors remaining in Iraq.

Although the surge had quelled the insurgency, Iran and Syria made good use of the intervening period to rearm their proxies in Iraq. Unfriendly groups attempted to disrupt the withdrawal by attacking cargo convoys and striking American bases with rockets. To reduce the risks faced by departing U.S. personnel, 500 military personnel and defense contractors

STATUS OF FORCES AGREEMENT

This jointly agreed framework defines how American troops operate within an allied nation. In November 2007, President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki signed a document setting out key milestones of a proposed SOFA. Although most of the milestones were achieved, negotiators failed to agree on which legal system would try American soldiers for crimes they committed while serving in Iraq. The absence of an agreed-upon SOFA contributed significantly to the decision to remove all U.S. forces from Iraq in 2011.



A convoy of Army vehicles lined up in a staging area during the Operation New Dawn drawdown.

left by air each day beginning in early fall 2011. However, oversize or bulky equipment items still had to depart via ground convoy to Kuwait. For the most part, the rocket barrages and convoy attacks were little more than a nuisance, but the 25th Infantry Division committed significant assets to protect each convoy while working with Iraqi security forces to safeguard the remaining installations in country.

In late November 2011, the 25th Infantry Division staff relocated to Contingency Operating Base ADDER outside An Nasiriyah to monitor the departure of the remaining American troops. The last members of the division left Iraq aboard an Air Force C-17 transport before the last ground element left for Kuwait. The convoy of 500 soldiers from the 3d Brigade Combat Team, 1st

Cavalry Division, departed before sunrise on December 18, 2011. Because local television had been banned from covering the event, Iraqis did not learn that American troops had departed their country until long after the convoy entered Kuwait. The crossing of the final vehicle over the Iraq-Kuwait border marked the conclusion of a spate of transition ceremonies, including a flag-folding held several days earlier in Baghdad as well as formal visits to Iraq by Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. and Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta, and a trip to Washington by Prime Minister al-Maliki.

THE SURGE IN AFGHANISTAN, 2010–2011

As the surge in Iraq drew to a close, some members of the Bush cabinet felt that the United States should mount a similar effort in Afghanistan. Although President Bush commissioned a study of the proposal, nothing of importance emerged as the 2008 presidential campaign ended in November. On January 20, 2009, President Barack Obama entered the White House with a far different view than his predecessor. He and his senior advisers believed that graft and corruption within the Karzai administration undermined American efforts. In addition to having qualms about America's Afghan partners, the new president took a more critical view of neighboring Pakistan's role in the conflict. Although Obama considered the Bush-era Global War on Terrorism approach to be no longer applicable, he asked Robert M. Gates to remain as secretary of defense and retained Lt. Gen Douglas E. Lute as deputy national security advisor.

Obama took the first step toward devising a new strategy when he asked former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) analyst Bruce O. Riedel to examine the progress of U.S. efforts. Riedel assembled a group of subject-matter experts to determine the way ahead by examining past events and the current situation. The deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, however, forced the Obama administration to act before deliberations were complete. On February 17, the White House

announced that it would send 17,000 more American troops to Afghanistan to secure the presidential election scheduled for August, and 4,000 more trainers to augment the current U.S. security force assistance effort. These reinforcements increased the number of U.S. troops to 68,000.

Riedel presented his findings to the president in late March 2009. The report departed from previous policy by recommending that the United States acknowledge that the Afghan conflict involved neighboring Pakistan. Although Riedel advocated expanding military and diplomatic efforts over a greater geographic area, he believed that the United States should concentrate on threats capable of striking the American homeland rather than on the activity of extremist groups throughout the region. In addition, Riedel recommended a greater emphasis on training and equipping the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) in order to set the conditions for an ISAF withdrawal following the transfer of all security responsibilities to the Afghans.

In a speech to the American public on March 27, President Obama laid out his strategy for the war. He emphasized that the war's "core goal" was "to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future," and outlined the proposed change in focus and scope: "[W]e will shift the emphasis of our mission to training and increasing the size of Afghan security forces, so that they can eventually take the lead in securing their country. That's how we will prepare Afghans to take responsibility for their security, and how we will ultimately be able to bring our own troops home." The newly appointed CENTCOM commander, General David H. Petraeus, planned to implement the president's vision by mounting an "Afghan surge." Holding up recent events in Iraq as a successful model, Petraeus exhorted the administration and Congress to use all resources, government and otherwise, in a comprehensive strategy to defeat the enemy militarily and promote political reconciliation. Based on the methods that U.S. forces had used with apparent success in Iraq, Petraeus sought to deploy troops to protect the Afghan people while simultaneously targeting Taliban enclaves and leadership. He also wanted to reconfigure the existing ISAF headquarters by forming a multinational tactical headquarters and a multinational security force assistance-and-training command.

ISAF commander General David D. McKiernan, however, disagreed with Petraeus' recommendations for command and control changes. Not only did McKiernan want less rather than more international headquarters structure, but he also had misgivings about applying the population-centric approach to counterinsurgency used in Iraq to the situation on the ground in Afghanistan. He interpreted the guidance of Army and Marine Corps Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (December 2006), as directing him



Marking the end of Operation NEW DAWN at Baghdad's Sather Air Base, December 15, 2011.

to redeploy troops to cover major urban areas and thoroughfares. McKiernan felt that even though these measures had been successful in Iraq, applying those tactics to Afghanistan would cede the initiative to an enemy force that drew its support from less-populated regions.

With 21,000 additional forces authorized and the U.S. military's priorities shifting from Iraq to Afghanistan, discussions at McKiernan's headquarters refocused on what missions to assign to the incoming troops. For the most part, enemy activity in the south drove the decisions. McKiernan directed a significant portion of the promised reinforcements, primarily U.S. marines, to combat the growing threat to stability in Helmand Province. Although the main effort would shift to RC-South, he also saw good reason to reinforce RC-East. In 2008, violence had spiked in Wardak and Logar Provinces, which controlled the approaches to Kabul.

As additional troops began arriving, Secretary of Defense Gates felt that he needed to solve another problem important to both Karzai and Obama: civilian casualties. He agonized over how to make the necessary corrections. "I don't believe any military force ever worked harder to avoid innocent victims," Gates wrote in his memoir, "but it seemed like every incident was a strategic defeat and we needed to take dramatic action." During the first half of 2009, ISAF airstrikes killed more than 300 Afghan civilians. McKiernan had issued updated tactical directives stressing the need to avoid the loss of innocent life, but noncombatants still died as bombing attacks and Special Forces raids inadvertently targeted the wrong people.

McKiernan's resistance to the new command and control model, combined with growing unease about civilian deaths, convinced Gates that the ISAF needed a new leader, and so Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael G. Mullen asked McKiernan to retire. Taken aback, McKiernan responded that if Mullen and Gates wanted to replace him, they would have to fire him. Gates wrote in his memoir: "The President understood the potential for a political ruckus caused by firing the senior commander in the war but he was determined to make the change." Gates flew to Kabul, where he accepted McKiernan's resignation on May 11, 2009.

During this period, RC-East had been experiencing troop turnover on a grander scale. In January 2009, the recently returned 3d Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, launched operations in Wardak, Logar, and Kunar Provinces under Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) 101 commander Maj. Gen. Jeffrey J. Schloesser. As Task Force SPARTAN concentrated on securing and clearing its area of operations, newly arrived units replaced the other brigades of CJTF-101 during the first half of 2009. The 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division (Task Force YUKON), relieved the departing 4th Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, in March. On June 3, Maj. Gen. Curtis M. Scaparrotti's 82d Airborne Division replaced Schloesser's 101st Airborne Division and reflagged the headquarters as CJTF-82. Just after CJTF-82 arrived, the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division (Task Force MOUNTAIN WARRIOR), relieved the 1st Infantry Division's Task Force DUKE.

Although the August presidential elections were the priority that summer, CJTF-82 soon found itself responding to an unforeseen development. On June 30, 2009, Pfc. Beaudry R. "Bowe" Bergdahl left the small Forward Operating Base SHARANA in Paktika Province without the permis-

sion or knowledge of his chain of command. Assuming that Bergdahl had been captured by the Taliban, CJTF-82 launched a massive search involving thousands of personnel and dozens of helicopters. Every bit of information on Bergdahl's location, regardless of its plausibility, had to be verified by sending soldiers to the site in question. To make matters even more difficult, the scope of the search area expanded as time passed. The constant movement of troops, combined with their attendant logistical needs, nearly overwhelmed RC-East's available helicopter fleet for the next five months. Intelligence sources eventually confirmed that the Taliban was holding Bergdahl, and he remained under their control for almost five years until he was exchanged in 2014 for several insurgent commanders being held by the Americans.



Setting up a tactical satellite communications system during a mission in Wardak Province.

NEW COMMANDER, NEW OPERATIONS

McKiernan's successor, General Stanley A. McChrystal, arrived in Afghanistan on June 15, 2009. The new ISAF commander enjoyed a stellar reputation from his previous work in the special operations community during the Iraqi surge. He wasted no time implementing a new tactical directive and issuing guidance to reduce civilian casualties. He also established the three-star headquarters desired by Petraeus and Gates, designated as ISAF Joint Command, under American Lt. Gen. David M. Rodriguez, and created the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) Training Mission–Afghanistan under American Lt. Gen. William B. Caldwell IV to unify NATO and U.S. efforts in building Afghan security forces.

McChrystal's next priority was to identify his main effort. The legitimacy of the upcoming Afghan presidential and provincial council elections depended on getting Pashtuns to vote. Since the Pashtuns were concentrated in the south and east of Afghanistan, the ISAF planned to expand security in both regions before the elections. Knowing that the marines were available, the secretary of defense chose them to secure Helmand Province. Starting in mid-2009, Marine forces flooded into southern Helmand to seize control of the logistical lines that were providing the Taliban with money and fighters in exchange for opium. On July 2, more than 4,000 personnel from the Marine Expeditionary Brigade–Afghanistan and 650 Afghan soldiers launched Operation KHANJAR (Dari for “strike of the sword”) in the Helmand River valley. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, and 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, moved into Nawa and Garmser Districts, respectively, with the assistance of the U.S. Army's Combat Aviation Brigade, 82d Airborne Division. British, Estonian, and other coalition forces followed the U.S. and Afghan forces to establish a longer-term presence. Though the operation initially was successful, the marines reported problems getting local



Secretary Gates (left) with General McChrystal in Afghanistan, March 2010.

leaders to support their presence in Helmand. The elders told the marines that because the Taliban had returned after previous ISAF operations to conduct reprisals against those who aided coalition troops, they were hesitant to embrace the newcomers.

The 2009 Afghan presidential election, held on August 20, was the second presidential election under Afghanistan's post-Taliban constitution and was held on the same day as elections for seats in the thirty-four provincial councils. Although voter turnout was lower than at the 2004 election, accusations of widespread ballot stuffing and other electoral fraud were rampant. Because incumbent president Hamid Karzai won just less than the required 50 percent of the vote, a runoff was scheduled for October, but Karzai's

opponent withdrew from the race soon afterward, which meant that the Afghan president had won a second (if contested) term in office.

On August 30, 2009, McChrystal gave CENTCOM his assessment of the situation in Afghanistan. Specifically, he wanted more troops, beyond the additional 21,000 granted earlier, to conduct a "fully resourced" counterinsurgency strategy. When the *Washington Post* published a minimally redacted copy of McChrystal's classified assessment a few weeks later, suggestions that the report had been leaked in order to pressure President Obama into approving McChrystal's request triggered an extended debate within the administration, delaying any action on the report. As a result, the ISAF commander had to wait three months to learn that he would receive only a portion of the forces he originally requested. In addition, the White House placed an eighteen-month limit on the Afghan surge to ensure that U.S. commanders remained focused on setting the conditions to transfer security responsibilities to the Afghans.

As the leaked McChrystal report was being debated, the insurgents launched a high-profile attack on October 3. During the predawn hours, hundreds of Taliban fighters attacked Combat Outpost KEATING, held by a reinforced platoon from Troop B, 3d Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, and an ANA platoon, located near the village of Kamdesh in Nuristan Province. Enemy preassault preparatory fires pinned down U.S. and ANA mortar crews, inflicted casualties, and suppressed all vehicle-mounted heavy weapons. Under the cover of the opening barrage, the attackers penetrated the ANA-held section of the perimeter. After killing or wounding the Afghan soldiers who chose to fight rather than flee, the Taliban tried to breach the U.S. portion of the outpost. In a grueling close-range engagement, the Americans managed to kill or drive off their attackers.

A postbattle analysis highlighted the disparity of resources available to soldiers fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Unlike Iraq, where myriad supporting assets often were available within a few moments after an engagement began, the first pair of F-15E fighters appeared above KEATING forty-

SPC. TY M. CARTER
(1980–)

Specialist Carter distinguished himself while serving with Troop B, 3d Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, in Kamdesh District, Afghanistan, on October 3, 2009. Carter and his comrades awoke that morning to an attack by an overwhelming force occupying high ground surrounding Combat Outpost KEATING. After making his way to the perimeter, Carter repeatedly crossed 100 meters of open ground to collect ammunition, retrieve a radio from a fallen comrade,

and carry wounded to safety. Although the American defenders lost eight soldiers, Carter played a key role in preventing the attackers from overrunning the U.S. position.



one minutes after the Taliban opened the battle. The fighters made strafing runs and dropped bombs on enemy positions. Fifteen minutes later, the first team of Apache gunships arrived. Worn down by the hail of aerial ordnance, the Taliban retreated when U.S. ground reinforcements arrived. Eight U.S. and three Afghan soldiers, as well as dozens of their assailants, died during the nine-hour battle, while numerous Taliban, twenty-two U.S., and five Afghan soldiers were wounded. To reduce the vulnerability of small American units occupying bases near Taliban infiltration routes in RC-East, the U.S. forces chose to abandon KEATING—in accordance with the original plans that had been placed on hold during the search for Private Bergdahl.

Aware that the KEATING assault had been a Taliban effort to draw troops away from RC-South, ISAF continued to focus on eliminating enemy enclaves in Helmand and Kandahar Provinces. McChrystal wanted to demonstrate visible progress by expanding upon the gains that the marines had made during Operation KHANJAR. McChrystal's vision, dubbed Operation MOSHTARAK (Dari for "together"), sought to demonstrate that combining increased troop strength with counter-insurgency techniques could clear areas of combatants, hold territory, and help build support for the central government in an enemy-held region. The RC-South commander, British Lt. Gen. Nicholas P. Carter, was responsible for executing the operation. General Carter slated MOSHTARAK to begin soon after the August 2009 elections, but logistical issues and the delayed deployment of additional forces prompted ISAF to postpone it until 2010.

Even though the main effort had been delayed, General Carter initiated the preparatory phase of MOSHTARAK in August 2009 by ordering the 5th Brigade Combat Team, 2d Infantry Division, to take control of the road network through the Taliban-held Arghandab Valley northwest of Kandahar. Tensions soon rose after Carter denied requests from the road-bound Stryker brigade to target enemy enclaves in the surrounding terrain. The Stryker chain of command felt that their troops were suffering unnecessary casualties from improvised explosive devices (IEDs) because they were prohibited from targeting bomb-making facilities in the area. The ISAF leadership saw the American stance as stubborn and unreasonable. The tension subsided only after ISAF gave the Strykers another mission and replaced them with a battalion from Task Force FURY (4th Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division).

On February 13, 2010, phase II of Operation MOSHTARAK began when 1,420 marines and their affiliated Afghan forces air-assaulted into the Helmand Province town of Marjah and 900 British troops and their Afghan partners occupied the town of Nad Ali, northeast of Marjah. Company C, 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, had the unenviable mission of linking up with the air assault elements after clearing the roads into Marjah. Keenly aware of the Taliban's preference for seeding IEDs on heavily traveled thoroughfares, the marines employed a circuitous route that avoided roads and crossed water obstacles without using bridges in order to link up with their comrades in the center of Marjah. Marjah now belonged to the marines and the ANA. However, the Taliban-directed violence in Helmand Province did not end with Marjah's capture. It remained a source of growing frustration for the marines and their Afghan partners as well as for McChrystal. Although the marines achieved every objective they sought, the province remained an insurgent base whose inhabitants refused to acknowledge the Karzai government. Afghan government and ISAF claims that reconstruction efforts would begin immediately and that Kabul would reach out to the province's remaining inhabitants rang hollow, in large part because Afghan and American interagency participation fell far short of the marine effort. In fact, the people of Helmand viewed Operation MOSHTARAK in a negative light because they saw only armed troops rather than aid officials, construction crews, or earnest Afghan administrators.

Returning from Europe to Afghanistan soon after the marines seized Marjah, General McChrystal received an e-mail from a sergeant with 1st Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division. The sergeant invited McChrystal to a memorial for squad team leader Cpl. Michael K. Ingram, who had died in an IED attack on April 17, near where McChrystal had earlier accompanied a patrol from the same unit. McChrystal accepted the invitation and travelled to Zharay District with personal staff and *Rolling Stone* reporter Michael Hastings. Following the memorial service, McChrystal spoke with the fallen servicemember's platoon about the challenges of focusing on protecting the civilian population in order to defeat the insurgency. The soldiers did not respond positively to his remarks. Although McChrystal's staff tried to explain to Hastings that this reaction was normal, the *Rolling Stone* article that he published in mid-June reflected the platoon's skepticism. In the article, Hastings also recounted how McChrystal and his staff had made unprofessional remarks about Vice President Biden, others in the administration, and American allies. Senior administration officials and the press received

a leaked advance copy of the article well before its original June publication date.

On June 21, 2010, President Obama summoned McChrystal to the White House, intending to remove the general from his command in response to the remarks made by his staff. Before arriving, McChrystal issued a written apology to the commander in chief. Rather than relieve McChrystal, however, Obama accepted the general's offer to step down. During a 2015 interview with Army historians, Gates recounted that he told the president, "if you lose McChrystal, I believe we lose the war in Afghanistan." Gates cited the gains that the U.S. military had made in the relationship with Karzai and expressed concern about how long it might take to approve McChrystal's successor. According to Gates, "And without hesitation Obama says, 'How about Petraeus?'"

On July 4, General Petraeus departed CENTCOM to become ISAF's commanding general. Given the perceived success of the Iraqi surge, few could argue with his appointment. He quickly directed ISAF to adopt a more nuanced operational approach, dubbed the Anaconda Strategy, which blended elements of the population-centric version of counterinsurgency advocated by both the White House and McChrystal with the more kinetic aspects that McKiernan had favored.

SECURING KANDAHAR

Phase II of Operation MOSHTARAK had concentrated on western Helmand Province. Phase III, redesignated as Operation HAMKARI (Dari for "cooperation"), targeted the Kandahar region in a multiphase effort spaced over six months. The core of the HAMKARI plan involved three successive efforts: secure Kandahar city, finish the job started by the Stryker brigade in the Arghandab Valley, and clear the Zharay and Panjwai Districts to the west and southwest of Kandahar. HAMKARI also sought to intimidate hostile Pashtun tribes by demonstrating ISAF willingness to send an overwhelming number of troops into southern Afghanistan.

In the opening moves of HAMKARI, an ad hoc force from the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division, established a loose cordon around Kandahar. In late June, the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, deployed from Fort Carson, Colorado, replaced the paratroopers. The newly arrived U.S. troops protected Afghan security forces as they constructed sixteen checkpoints in and around the city. American military police assisted both the ANP and the civil order police in opening substations at each checkpoint. The joint checkpoints reaped visible dividends as violence within the city decreased dramatically. In four months, the number of security personnel in the Kandahar region swelled to 24,000 soldiers and police. ANA force levels tripled while Afghan police experienced a fivefold increase.

The 2d Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Task Force STRIKE), drew the mission of clearing the Arghandab region. General Carter considered that task so important that he assigned two additional battalions, drawn from the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, and the 2d Cavalry Regiment, to augment Task Force STRIKE. The brigade deployed its field artillery battalion operating as infantry, along with dismounted tankers from the 4th Infantry Division's 1st Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment, to perform the most critical part of the mission.

In a grueling ninety-day battle, the dismounted tankers and field artillery soldiers reduced heavily defended enclaves in the Arghandab River valley while other units prevented the enemy from escaping or sending reinforcements. All told, Task Force STRIKE killed hundreds of Taliban at the cost of 65 Americans dead and 426 wounded. The shift to highly kinetic operations reflected Petraeus' willingness to protect the civilian population by eliminating enemy strongholds near major urban areas.

Once the insurgent enclaves in the Arghandab had been eliminated, HAMKARI refocused on the region southwest of Kandahar. In September and October 2010, three U.S. infantry battalions began simultaneously clearing eastern, central, and western Zharay with partnered ANA battalions (more commonly referred to as *kandaks*). Both of the 2d Brigade Combat Team's organic infantry battalions attacked southward while an attached squadron from 2d Cavalry Regiment blocked enemy escape to the west. A third U.S. infantry battalion, Special Operations Forces, and three Afghan kandaks cleared the adjacent Horn of Panjwayi in a two-day operation that began on 15 October. The Americans expected stiff enemy resistance in this last Taliban enclave, but the enemy leadership fled for the city of Kandahar, where they blended into the population rather than fight to the death.

By November 2010, Afghan and ISAF forces had greatly reduced the Taliban threat to Kandahar city and its outlying districts. Although Special Operations units continued to launch targeted operations against enemy leaders and bomb-making cells, no further major clearing efforts occurred after the surge peaked in March 2011. Subsequent events disclosed that even though ISAF succeeded in buying the time needed to expand and improve Afghan security forces, its actions did not cripple the insurgency. With its leadership decimated and enclaves within Afghanistan in government hands, the Taliban retreated to its Pakistani sanctuaries to regroup. Although HAMKARI sapped Pashtun support for the insurgency, Taliban leaders remained confident of their brethren's renewed backing once the ISAF began downsizing in the south.

CHANGES WITHIN THE ARMY

The American withdrawal from Iraq, which took place during the Afghan surge, heralded major changes within the Army as it confronted multiple challenges. These included downsizing, adjusting to new strategic priorities, restructuring for decisive operations, implementing regional alignment programs across the entire force, and reorganizing both active and reserve component training. All of these initiatives took place within an environment that demanded constant oversight to ensure that objectives were met within tightening budget limits.

Shrinking personnel authorizations was the most daunting challenge. In 2012, the Army end strength totaled 570,000. In 2013, the DOD announced a drawdown designed to bring the force to 490,000 soldiers by the end of fiscal year (FY) 2017, and in 2014 another round of cuts lowered the authorized FY 2018 end strength to 450,000. This meant that the Army had to release 10,000 more soldiers per year than originally planned. However, as the resurgent Russian threat in Eastern Europe became more apparent, the Obama administration halted the reductions, allowing the Army to provide more soldiers to several units slated for permanent station over-

seas and discard plans to inactivate or reduce other overseas organizations. By December 2016, the Army's authorized active-duty strength stood at 476,000. Additional growth came in October 2017 when the Army gained 17,000 more authorizations. Both developments came as welcome news to a force with 180,000 personnel forward deployed in about 140 countries.

NEW APPROACHES TO TRAINING

Events in Europe imparted a greater sense of urgency to the ongoing effort to revamp the deployment-based programs that the Army had adopted a decade earlier. As early as June 2003, Army senior leaders were aware that the policies put in place after the September 11th attacks could not sustain wartime requirements, in addition to meeting other global commitments, indefinitely. Recognizing that more personnel would not be forthcoming, the Army developed a new method of training and equipping units for combat compatible with its preference for individual unit deployments. The new approach, known as Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN), replaced a static tiered readiness model with a cyclical model. In tiered readiness, the Army allocated money and resources to different units based on how fast they were expected to deploy in the event of war. Top-tier units like the 82d Airborne Division had first priority for personnel, equipment, vehicles, and training because they were expected to deploy anywhere on the globe within hours of an alert. Other units, both active and reserve, were a lower priority for resources because they were supposed to have months to prepare for war after being alerted. Under ARFORGEN, by contrast, units entered into a three- or five-year cycle for active and reserve units respectively. After units entered the cycle with low readiness, they would add personnel and equipment and gain more resources as they trained in preparation to deploy at full readiness in the last stage of the cycle. Upon redeployment, units would lose their priority status when they returned home, and would give up their resources to other higher-priority units nearing their own deployments. Acknowledging that it needed more brigade combat teams to ensure that the new approach met operational needs, the Army also implemented a modular reorganization to generate the necessary number of units. Modularity resulted in smaller maneuver brigades augmented with capabilities drawn from higher echelons as they progressed through predeployment training.

Although ARFORGEN satisfied wartime requirements, it was ill-suited to peacetime needs. In 2014, the Army replaced ARFORGEN with a platoon-through corps-level system aimed at rebuilding and maintaining proficiency across a broader range of skills. Known as the Sustainable Readiness Model, the new approach challenged unit commanders to be ready at short notice to deploy anywhere around the globe against a wide range of opponents. This model was a major departure from the centrally managed ARFORGEN, where units knew in advance when, where, against whom, and for how long they would be deployed in combat.

All units, regardless of component, adhered to a common readiness reporting standard, known as Objective-T, through monthly Unit Status Reports. Senior commanders in the active component, guard, and reserve used these reports to categorize units in one of three modules: prepare, ready, and mission. Units in the "prepare" module concentrated on live fire, command post, and force-on-force maneuver training at their home

stations to master individual and collective skills. Once active component brigades crossed the proficiency threshold from the “prepare” to the “ready” module, they became eligible for a combat training center rotation. The path for National Guard brigade combat teams differed in that they transitioned during a four-year cycle from “prepare” to “ready” modules only after they had completed a combat training center rotation. Regardless of component, units entered the “mission” module once they had deployed.

The Sustainable Readiness Model sought to achieve reserve component readiness levels far higher than those seen before September 11, 2001. Available training days for selected National Guard combat units increased, with thirty-nine training days during the first year, forty-eight days in the second year, sixty days in the third year, and fifty-one days in the final year. To enhance premobilization readiness, the Army adopted a pilot program pairing up reserve and active component units, known as the Associated Units Program. For reserve component organizations, the Associated Units Program involved extra drill periods and up to three weeks additional annual training with their active counterparts.

In an effort to overcome the perennial problem of improving reserve component readiness, the Army reached back into history for a solution. It rejuvenated a program known as BOLD SHIFT, originally adopted in 1992 to address difficulties experienced by Army National Guard brigade combat teams preparing for Operation DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM. Before the end of that conflict, none of the brigades selected to deploy to Kuwait were judged as ready for combat. Rather than continuing to defer reserve component training until units were called up, BOLD SHIFT emphasized premobilization reserve component training. The new program, however, remained untested until the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Although readiness issues had a limited direct impact on reserve units selected to deploy, the reserves were affected more by DOD decisions to provide them with personnel and equipment stripped from nondeploying units rather than from the BOLD SHIFT initiatives. In fact, the Army discovered that outdated infrastructure prevented BOLD SHIFT from achieving its desired impact.

The first step toward addressing that issue involved moving training support units closer to mobilization training centers. To minimize the disruption to training, the transfers took place over a multiyear period starting in 2008. The move alleviated long-standing quality-of-life issues for instructors who previously had spent long periods away from their families on temporary duty status. The Army also trimmed postmobilization training for reserve combat units after realizing that much of their personnel had gained recent combat experience through repeated deployments. In 2012, the Army modified the BOLD SHIFT program once more by placing active component/reserve component training support, mobilization, and demobilization under the First United States Army at Rock Island Arsenal, Illinois. As a result, the First Army shrank from sixteen brigades spread across the continental United States to nine brigades based at eight mobilization centers and Fort Knox, Kentucky. By the end of the restructuring effort, the First Army had six combined arms training brigades and three functional/multifunctional training brigades focused on providing support to all types of reserve component units.

The First Army also experienced major internal changes as observer, controller, and trainer authorizations increased at the expense of adminis-

trative staff positions. The number of active component advisory slots rose from 36 percent of the First Army's approved end-strength to 90 percent of overall authorizations after a comprehensive downsizing eliminated numerous administrative positions. Recognizing that 75 percent of the reserve component consisted of combat support and combat service support organizations, the Army also assigned a much higher percentage of active component combat support and combat service support personnel to fill the First Army's advisory positions. Following the reshuffling, the First Army's personnel authorizations mirrored the composition of aligned reserve component units for the first time since the inception of BOLD SHIFT.



Soldiers firing a simulated missile during a training rotation.

TRANSITION FROM MODULAR BRIGADES

The ARFORGEN approach adopted in late 2003 replaced the process of assigning levels of combat readiness to a selected group of units with a model that accepted lower readiness levels across the force in order to ensure that units slated for deployment received needed training and equipment. To preserve the existing policy of rotating units between combat deployments and home station, however, ARFORGEN required that the Army create more brigades and strip assets from divisions in order to provide reorganized brigade combat teams with more capabilities.

Following Army Chief of Staff General Peter J. Schoomaker's decision to adopt ARFORGEN, a major internal reorganization effort known as Modularity began in 2004. Implementing the new program involved a degree of strategic risk as the Army discarded the corps and division force structure intended for conventional warfare in order to create more brigades optimized for counterinsurgency operations. Although the number of modular brigades allotted to a division increased, they generally were smaller than their predecessors, consisting of two maneuver battalions, a reconnaissance and surveillance squadron, a field artillery battalion, brigade support battalion, and brigade special troops battalion. However, Modularity was short-lived, as the Army initiated a new restructuring effort in 2011 to restore the conventional warfare capabilities it had abandoned seven years earlier.

The personnel reductions discussed earlier complicated the Army's postmodular reorganization. In addition to eliminating 32,300 temporary wartime positions, and 7,000 other authorizations, the 2013 round of reductions called for disbanding two Germany-based brigades, inactivating some units in eleven other brigades, and downsizing additional units that were not part of a brigade combat team. Following the DOD's 2014 announcement of additional cuts, the Army increased the number of inac-

tivating units while simultaneously compressing the reorganization period from four to two years. During 2014, the Army partially inactivated five brigade combat teams and reorganized twelve others while during 2015, eight more brigades inactivated and twenty reorganized.

The impact of postmodular reorganization depended in part on unit stations and their basic structure. Non-Stryker infantry and armor brigades in the United States received a third maneuver battalion from inactivating brigades, while their overseas counterparts remained at two maneuver battalions apiece. Special troops battalions transformed into engineer units in all brigade combat teams. Field artillery battalions converted from a modular design of two batteries each with eight guns to three batteries with six guns apiece. Field artillery battalions in infantry brigades were equipped with a mix of two 105-mm. and one 155-mm. howitzer batteries, while armor brigades had three 155-mm. howitzer batteries.

The shift to a new brigade force structure focused on conventional warfare also necessitated changes to the divisional command and control framework. Starting in July 2014, the Army brought back active component divisional artillery headquarters. The new headquarters lacked organic firing units, but it exercised command and control over all fire support assets under the division. In lieu of a dedicated divisional artillery headquarters, Army National Guard divisions paired with reserve component field artillery brigades in order to provide the brigades with similar capabilities without taking up additional personnel spaces. Reorganization efforts also took into account that American troops now faced potential adversaries that had mechanized conventional forces supported by formidable air defense and field artillery systems. As a result, the 3d Infantry Division's 2d Brigade Combat Team converted from infantry to armor in summer 2017, raising the Army's total number of armored brigades to fifteen—ten in the active force and five in the National Guard. Infantry brigade combat teams at Fort Carson and Fort Riley, Kansas, also would be converted into armored brigade combat teams. In addition to fielding more tanks, the Army replaced cannons in active field artillery brigades with rocket systems in order to enhance corps-level precision strike and counterfire capabilities.

REGIONALLY ALIGNED FORCES

As they prepared to face an uncertain future, Army senior leaders were determined to learn from past mistakes. During a March 2012 interview, Army Chief of Staff General Raymond T. Odierno reflected on events leading up to the invasion of Iraq: “[I]t was generally believed that cultural awareness was only required in select Army units, such as Special Forces or Civil Affairs.” According to one analyst, writing for *Foreign Policy* in May 2014, this meant that “most units were deployed without regard to building up regional expertise. . . . Implicit in this force management system was the assumption that military skills exist largely in a realm outside culture—that local populations are mostly just background noise.” The *Foreign Policy* article noted that Odierno's first deployment to Iraq convinced him that, “we went in there with a complete misunderstanding, regionally and inside Iraq, of what was going on. . . . I don't ever want that to happen again.”

U.S. AFRICA COMMAND (AFRICOM)

Until 2007, U.S. European Command, U.S. Central Command, and U.S. Pacific Command shared responsibility for the African continent. On February 6, 2007, Defense Secretary Robert Gates announced the formation of AFRICOM, headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany. The new command's mandate encompassed fifty-three countries, including the Cape Verde Islands, Equatorial Guinea, São Tomé and Príncipe, and the Indian Ocean islands of Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Seychelles. AFRICOM's day-to-day efforts are oriented toward promoting security cooperation and coordinating counterterrorist efforts against transnational threats rather than deterring regional aggression.

The Army's desire to avoid repeating these and other errors gained momentum in 2012 after the DOD published *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*. In addition to defining a new strategic focus, the report directed each of the services to prepare for myriad threats in uncertain operational environments. Recognizing that the new strategic direction meant that U.S. forces would have to interact with indigenous security forces and the population at large, in May 2012 General Odierno unveiled the Regionally Aligned Forces concept to ensure that the Army had the language skills, regional expertise, and cultural training needed to perform more effectively in combat.

The Army's collective transition to a regionally aligned force benefited from the fact that some individuals and formations, including Army Special Operations, civil affairs, psychological operations commands, foreign area officers, and the Army National Guard State Partnership Program, were already well versed in some cultures. However, as the new program would affect virtually every combat and support unit, to include corps and division headquarters, the Army would have to validate it on a smaller scale before adopting it in full. To test the new concept, the Army paired the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division (based at Fort Riley), with the U.S. Africa Command. During the preparatory phase from April 2012 to March 2013, African Studies students from Kansas State University and the 162d Infantry Brigade advisory training cadre from Fort Polk, Louisiana, provided language instruction, regional expertise, and cultural familiarization to the 2d Brigade's soldiers. The brigade's personnel found themselves mastering unfamiliar skills while preparing for missions far different from their previous experience in Iraq and Afghanistan.



Soldiers case their unit's colors in preparation for an upcoming deployment to Kuwait.

Encouraged by the pilot program's early successes, U.S. Forces Command embarked on a two-year effort to align corps, divisions, and brigades with geographic combatant commanders. That process paired the I Corps with U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM), the III Corps with CENTCOM, and the XVIII Airborne Corps with the Global Response Force. The 1st, 3d, and 4th Mechanized Divisions, along with the 1st Cavalry Division's 1st Brigade Combat Team, aligned with U.S. European Command, forming the American contribution to the NATO Response Force. The 2d and 25th Infantry Divisions plus the 1st Cavalry Division also aligned with PACOM while the 1st Armored Division aligned with CENTCOM. By the end of 2014, 90 percent of active combat brigades, 15 percent of Army National Guard combat brigades, and 100 percent of Army Reserve functional and multifunctional brigades were either allocated or aligned to combatant commands. (*See Map 41.*)

REFOCUSING ON THE PACIFIC

On October 11, 2011, the Obama administration took the first step toward reorienting American strategic focus from the Middle East by announcing the "America's Pacific Century" policy. Although the U.S. military had had a presence in the Pacific for more than a century, the new policy posed major challenges to a force that had been immersed

TERMINAL HIGH ALTITUDE AREA DEFENSE (THAAD)

THAAD is a mobile air defense system capable of detecting and tracking enemy missiles at a range of up to 1,000 kilometers. The project originally began in 1989, but technological challenges proved so daunting that fielding did not take place until April 2012. The four major system components are the launcher, interceptors, radar, and fire control. THAAD uses the radar data to place a kinetic interceptor on a collision course with incoming threats. Each battery is equipped with between six and nine launchers and two fire control systems.



in sustained land conflicts in southwest and central Asia against irregular opponents since late 2001. The geophysical characteristics of the Pacific region, which included long distances between operating bases, dependence on sea and air movement, and a diverse spectrum of potential military partners, required the U.S. Army to develop new competencies and relearn old skills. (See Map 42.)

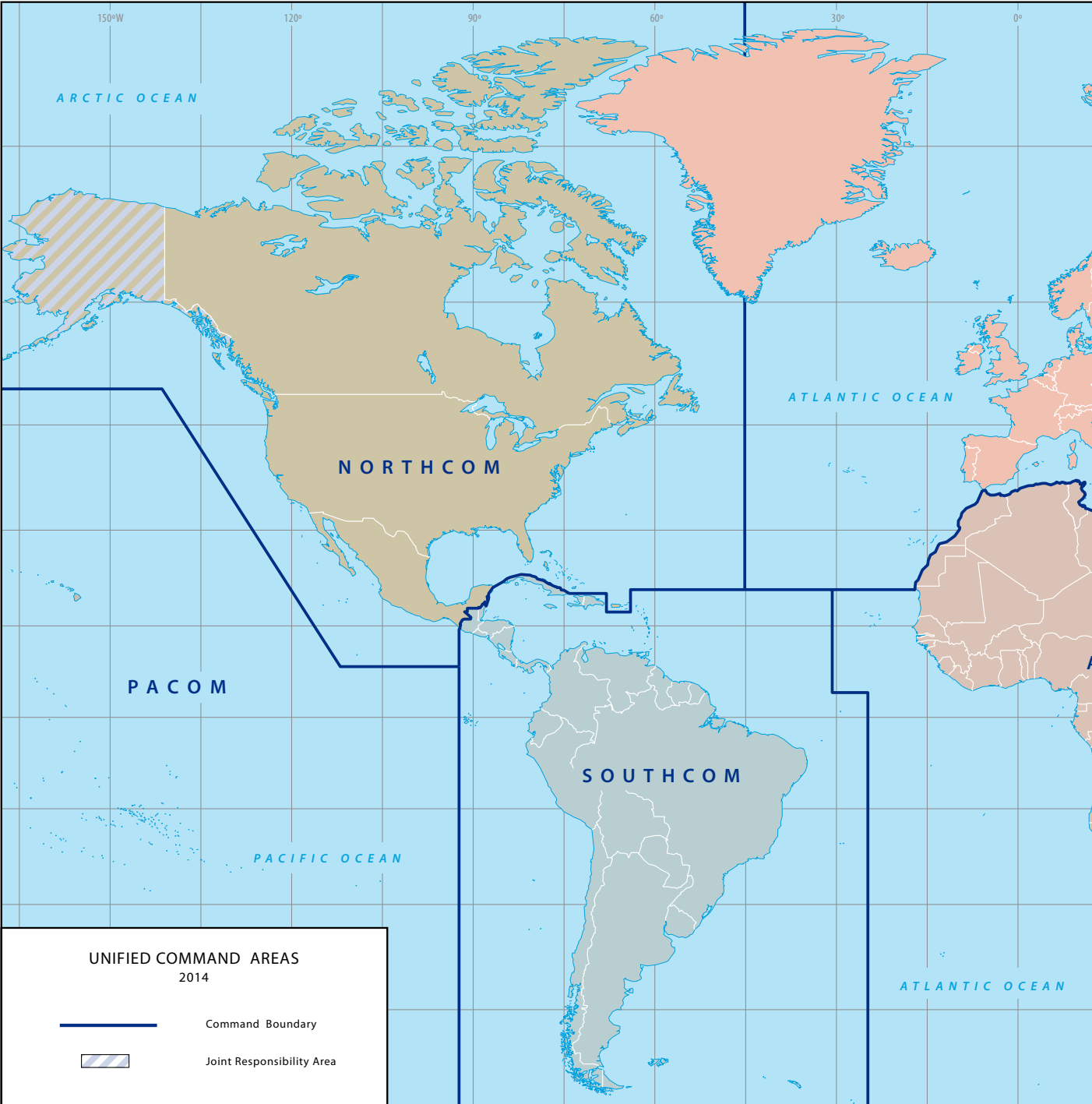
Even though the nations of the Asian land mass and Australasia are on the periphery of the vast Pacific Ocean, they constitute most of the military power in the Pacific. According to a 2014 RAND Corporation report: “the Army has historically been the most influential service in most Asian countries.” The military establishments of twenty-six of the thirty-six nations and territories in the region, which include seven of the ten largest land forces on the globe, are dominated by their armies. Although the Pacific Century policy had been designed to reassure American allies and partners that the United States would continue its history of active engagement in the Pacific, putting the policy into action required the U.S. Army to reshape many of its long-standing dispositions. For example, the constant force needs of the Iraq conflict meant that by 2011, only a single brigade combat team remained in Korea. Because political considerations prevented the Army from reopening bases closed by the Bush administration, it adopted a hybrid solution which would permanently station some units in Korea while rotating others between Korea and the United States. Under the new arrangement, a mix of headquarters, logistics, and fire support assets would be based on the peninsula while maneuver and aviation forces temporarily deployed to Korea on a regular basis.

In 2013, the Army began rotating stateside-based combat aviation battalions to South Korea. The following year, the rotations included combined arms maneuver battalions to augment the remaining forward-deployed brigade of 2d Infantry Division. Additionally, in 2014 the Army augmented the Eighth U.S. Army’s South Korea-based field artillery brigade with more Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) units. The following year, the Army began sending full brigade combat teams to South Korea after inactivating the 2d Infantry Division’s forward-deployed 1st Brigade Combat Team. The 2d Division now consisted of two Fort Lewis-based Stryker brigade combat teams, aviation and field artillery brigades, a sustainment brigade, and one rotational armored brigade combat team. This last team drew its major equipment items from pre-positioned stocks in Korea rather than transport them from the United States.

After North Korea conducted a half-dozen intermediate-range missile tests in the spring of 2016, the United States reinforced the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) antiballistic missile defense systems deployed in Hawaii and Guam. In July 2016, South Korean officials sup-

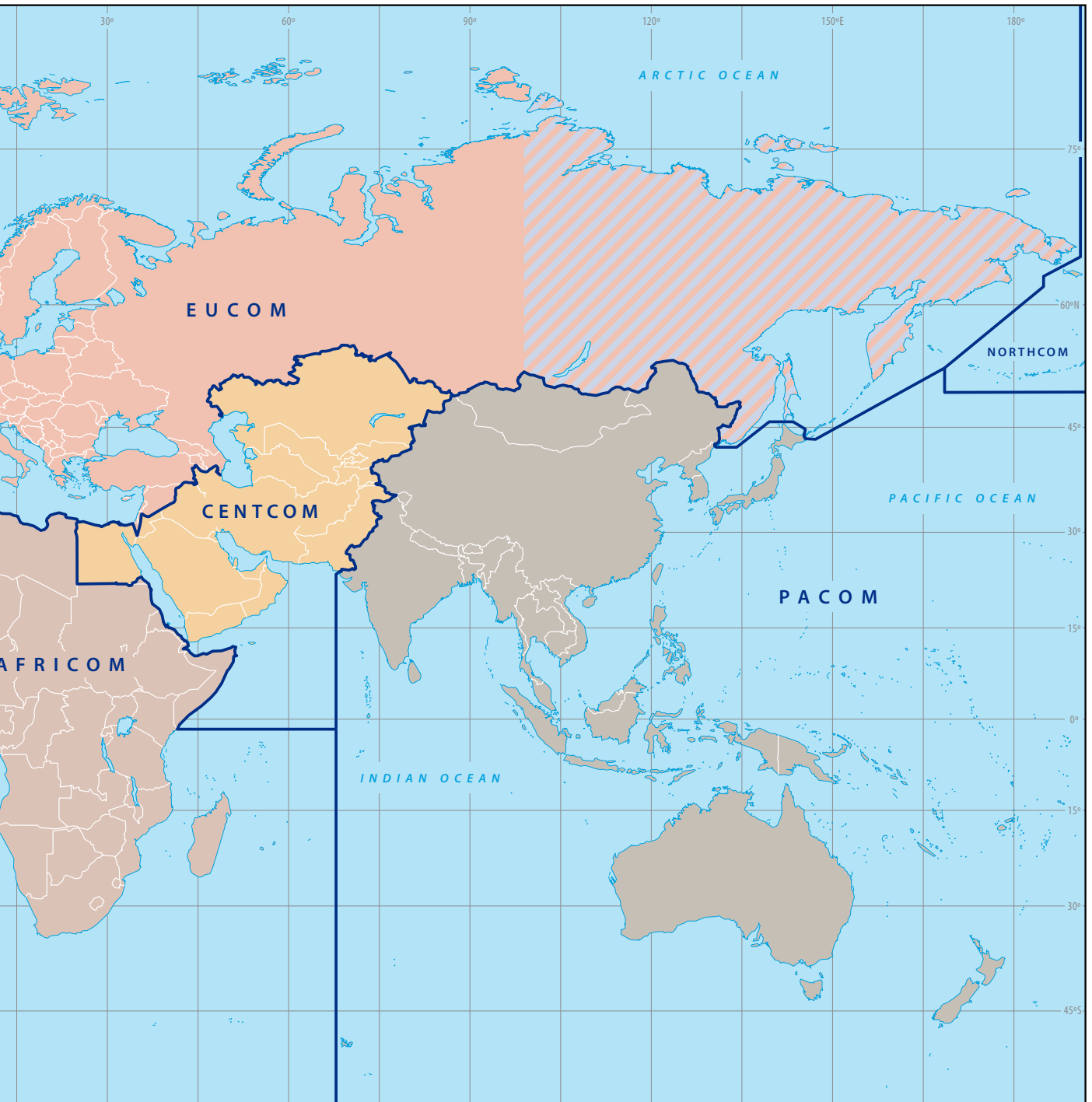


A UH-60 Black Hawk crew conducting deck landing qualifications off the coast of Hawaii.



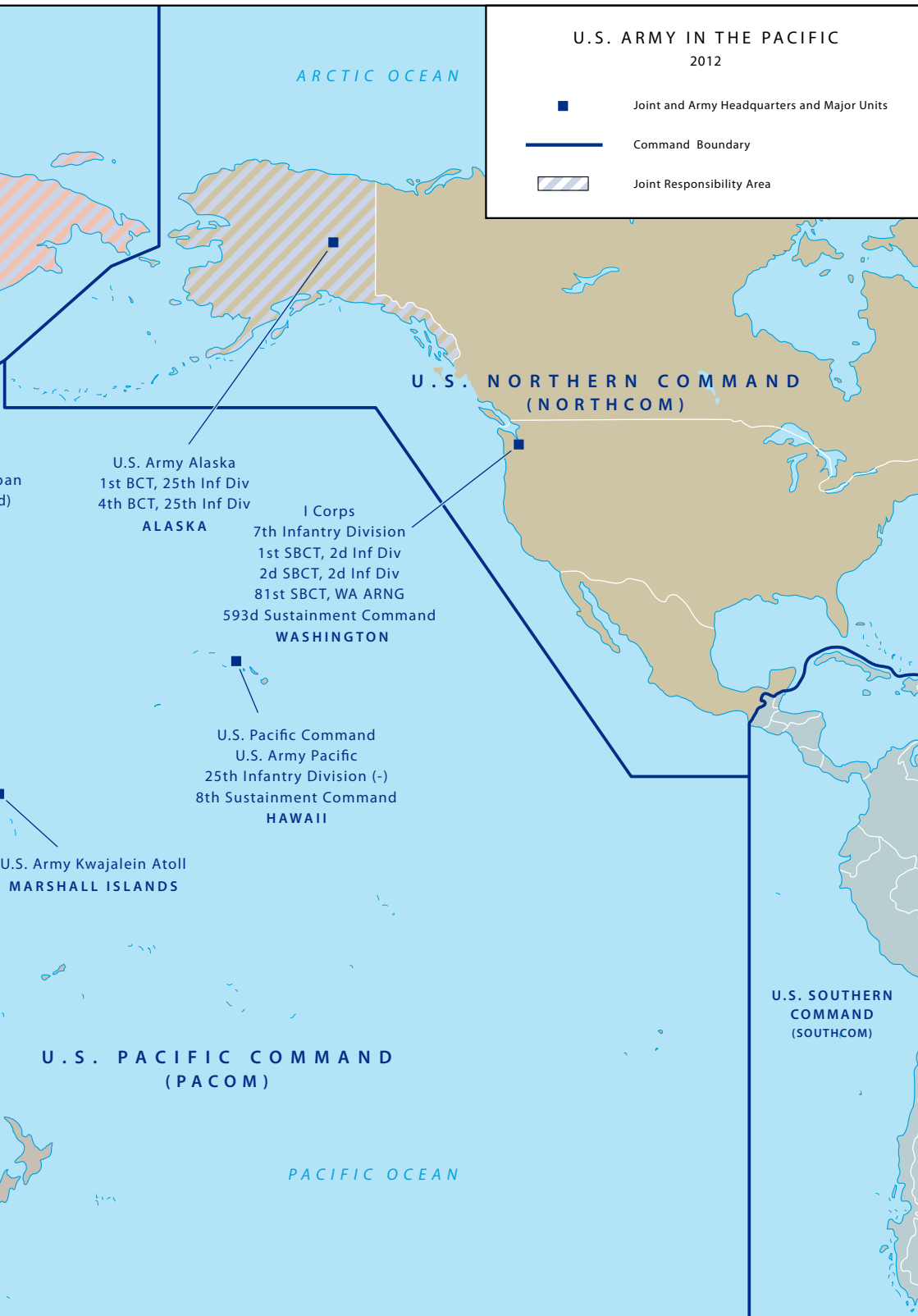
Map 41

THE EVOLVING STRATEGIC LANDSCAPE





Map 42





U.S. and Indonesian Army paratroopers participate in a PACOM joint exercise in Indonesia.

Infantry Division in Hawaii; 25,000 soldiers at Fort Lewis, assigned to the I Corps, the 7th Infantry Division, and 593d Sustainment Command; approximately 5,000 servicemembers of U.S. Army Japan, I Corps (Forward), and 10th Regional Support Group based in Japan (Honshu and Okinawa); and the 11,000-strong U.S. Army Alaska, with headquarters and subordinate units at Fort Wainwright and Anchorage.

On April 26, 2012, USARPAC, led by Lt. Gen. Francis J. Wiercinski, unveiled a new program designed to enhance expeditionary readiness and improve deployment capabilities.

On Wiercinski's initiative, PACOM adopted the "Pacific Pathways" approach in order to expand existing regional security cooperation initiatives. In its final form, the concept involved a brigade combat team participating in an integrated operation consisting of multiple exercises spread across three or four nations. The type of exercises and partner nations varied each year depending on diplomatic factors and strategic requirements.

The inaugural Pacific Pathways rotation began in August 2014 with Fort Lewis' 2d Brigade Combat Team, 2d Infantry Division. The brigade's organic elements were augmented by UH-60 Black Hawk and AH-64E attack helicopters from the Combat Aviation Brigade, 25th Infantry Division (deployed from Hawaii and Fort Carson), as well as additional staff from the I Corps, the



U.S. and Japanese soldiers share best practices during a bilateral military exercise.

ARMY LANDING CRAFT UTILITY 2000

In the 1990s, the Army procured thirty-five *Runnymede*-class landing craft, commonly known as LCU 2000, to replace its fleet of older U.S. Navy-designed vessels. Crewed by thirteen soldiers, the LCU 2000 can sail up to 16,000 kilometers under its own power or be transported to more distant places aboard a float-on/float-off vessel. LCU 2000s can ferry wheeled and tracked vehicles, containers, and other cargo ashore from anchored strategic sealift ships when ports or shipping terminals are unavailable. These shallow-draft craft can also navigate harbors, rivers, and inter-coastal waterways in which larger vessels cannot operate.



25th Infantry Division, and U.S. Army Japan. The steady-state phase began the following year with three brigade combat team rotations in different parts of the region, with two of the three rotations overlapping. In addition, the Army shifted away from hiring commercial ships for transporting the brigade combat teams and their equipment to contracting *Kocak*-class Military Sealift Command operational vessels and oceangoing Army Landing Craft Utility (LCU) 2000 watercraft.

According to diplomatic sources, Pacific Pathways bolstered security cooperation far more effectively than past arrangements because partner nations accepted the administration's explanation of its policies. In fact, most foreign officials viewed increased numbers of American troops in the region as a positive sign of U.S. commitment rather than a threat. Public polling in Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan echoed this positive assessment.

FROM ENDURING FREEDOM TO RESOLUTE SUPPORT

When NATO and Afghan officials gathered in Lisbon, Portugal, for their November 2010 summit, they recognized the formidable challenges associated with withdrawing ISAF units from Afghanistan. Those challenges included taking precautions to avoid becoming vulnerable to the Taliban during the withdrawal, training and equipping sufficient Afghan security forces to



A National Guard soldier and his Afghan Border Police counterpart discussing security in Kandahar Province.

assume responsibility for areas vacated by ISAF troops, putting systems in place before ISAF's departure that would allow Afghans to become self-sufficient, and preparing to leave behind a residual force, if required. The transition also would shift authority and responsibilities from PRTs to Afghan institutions, thus allowing the PRTs to be dissolved. The downsizing of ISAF presence would require a phased multiyear transfer of security responsibilities to Afghan security forces.

The opening rounds of the transition process were fairly straightforward, but ultimate success depended on ISAF's ability to train, equip, and advise the Afghan military and police units needed to complete the handover's final phase. The plan, dubbed INTEQAL ("transition" in both Dari and Pashto), would be more deliberate and complex

than the Iraq handover for several reasons. Not only had the United States made greater progress toward training and equipping Iraqi security forces, but the Taliban, having retreated to Pakistani sanctuaries rather than fight to the death, continued to pose a potential threat. Recognizing that Afghan security forces were not yet ready to assume responsibility for the entire country, Afghan and ISAF leaders adopted a five-stage plan in which coalition forces would transfer responsibility for secure provinces before moving on to more contested provinces. (See Map 43.) The first stage, involving Bamyan, Panjshir, Kabul (minus the Sarobi District), and districts surrounding certain provincial capitals, including Herat, Lashkar Gah, Mazar-e Sharif, and Mehtar Lam, occurred in July 2011. The second stage, five months later, involved Balkh, Takhar, Samangan, Daykundi, Nimroz, and Kabul Provinces, as well as selected districts in Parwan, Helmand, Ghazni, and Herat Provinces. The third stage involved the transfer of 122 additional districts in July 2012, as well as preparations for the final two stages. Upon completion of the fourth stage in early 2013, Afghan security forces had assumed responsibility for 87 percent of the nation's population and 312 districts in twenty-three of thirty-four provinces. The final stage, involving the remaining eleven provinces, took place in mid-2013.

Less than six months passed between the final stage and the dissolution of ISAF. On December 31, 2014, Operation RESOLUTE SUPPORT replaced ISAF as a noncombat NATO mission intended to continue the development of Afghan ministries. The United States transitioned its missions on the same date, replacing Operation ENDURING FREEDOM with Operation FREEDOM'S SENTINEL.

BALANCING SECURITY FORCE ASSISTANCE AND RETROGRADE

When marine General John R. Allen succeeded General David H. Petraeus as ISAF commander on July 18, 2011, he changed ISAF's

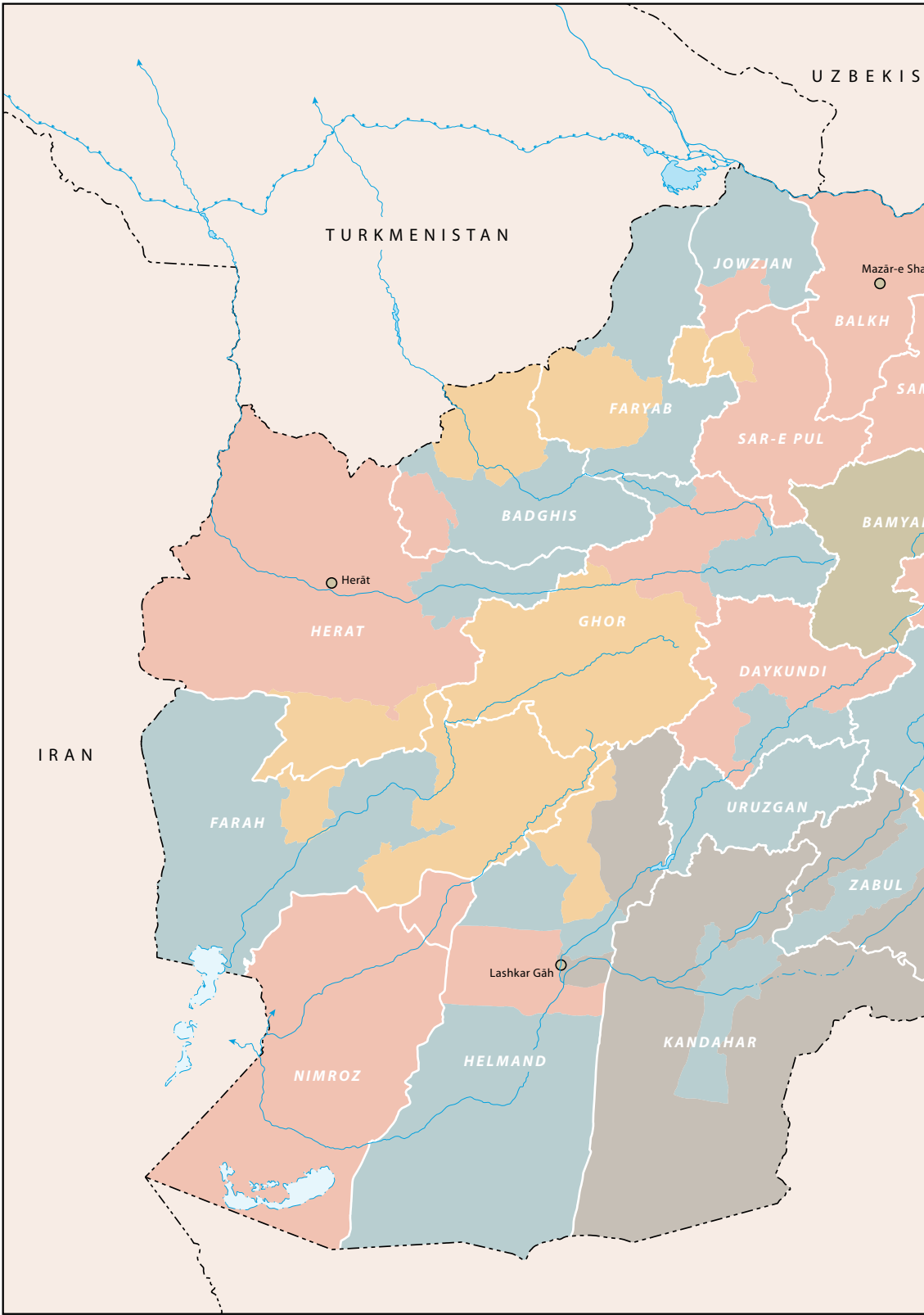
focus from counterinsurgency operations to security force assistance. As a result, the U.S. Army shifted from deploying generic maneuver brigades to sending maneuver brigades augmented with the resources needed to also conduct security force assistance. Beginning in late 2012, the Army reconfigured combat arms brigades rotating to Afghanistan to delete their maneuver elements and focus entirely on the advise and assist mission. Dedicated security force assistance brigades (SFABs) bolstered Afghan-led combat operations with additional fire support, logistics, medical, and command and control, until their counterparts became more proficient at mastering those tasks without American assistance.

The NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan was ISAF’s primary means of providing the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) with the personnel and equipment needed to assume nationwide security responsibilities. Between November 2009 and August 2011, it issued 56,859 weapons, 10,700 vehicles, and 70,262 radios to the Afghan Army, which expanded during the same period by 74,000 personnel and sixty-four infantry battalions. Although these figures highlighted the mission’s impressive achievements, they also indicated its long-term challenges. Because earlier American and coalition efforts to create Afghan military and police units had concentrated on producing combatants rather than support elements, the few logistical units available to the Afghan military struggled to maintain growing stockpiles of incoming equipment.

SECURITY FORCE ASSISTANCE BRIGADES

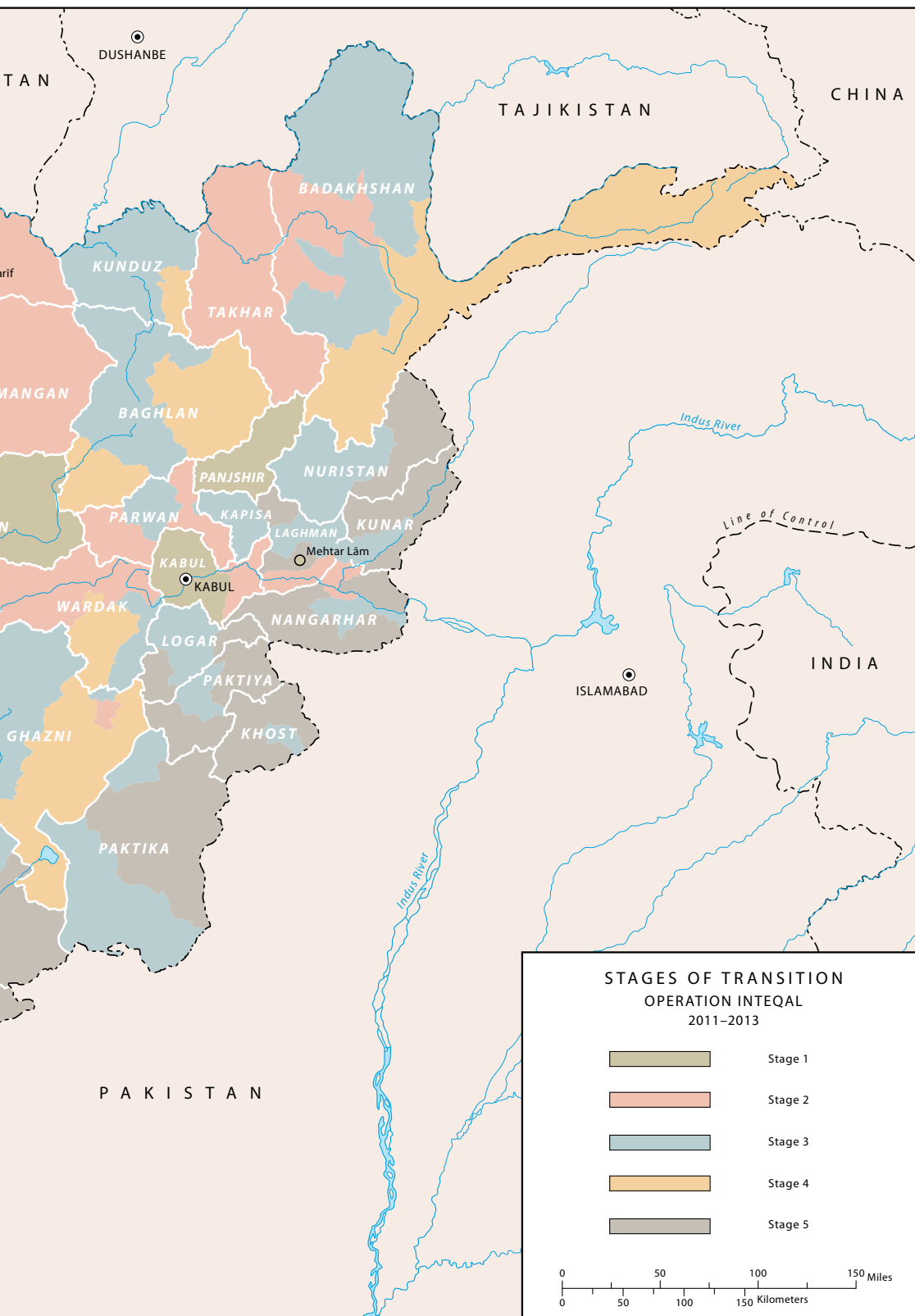
In early 2009, the Army began reorganizing conventional brigade combat teams to temporarily perform advisory duties. These units, known as advise and assist brigades, were trained and equipped to work with Iraqi civilian officials and security personnel. When similar units began deploying to Afghanistan, where their mission placed far less emphasis on improving civil governance, the Army renamed them security force assistance brigades. The Army activated the first permanent SFAB at Fort Benning, Georgia, in October 2017. It is staffed by 800 officers and noncommissioned officers with proven skills and prior experience in advising.





Map 43

THE EVOLVING STRATEGIC LANDSCAPE



In addition to building up Afghan logistical infrastructure, ISAF aided ANA, ANP, and National Directorate of Security efforts to develop an integrated campaign plan. Operation NAWEEED (Dari for “good news”) involved all six ANA Corps, the separate 111th Division, the ANP, the National Directorate of Security, and numerous government ministries. The wide range of participants reflected the plan’s ambitious scope, which sought to block insurgent groups from conducting operations while also preventing criminal elements such as smugglers, kidnappers, extortionists, and drug lords from taking advantage of the security transition. The Afghan coauthors of Operation NAWEEED recognized that security transition involved more than transferring responsibility from one party to the other. The campaign plan directed shaping operations in Farah, Helmand, Kandahar, Khost, Kunar, Logar, Nangarhar, Nimroz, Nuristan, Paktiya, and Zabul Provinces to wrest the operational initiative from the Taliban. Afghan security forces also would have to blunt enemy counterattacks so as to maintain security in these key areas. Although ISAF would continue to provide close air support, helicopters, medical evacuation, and other critical services, General Allen convinced the Afghan Ministry of Defense to rely on Afghan logistical resources rather than coalition assistance.

As INTEQAL gathered momentum, Obama administration officials initiated talks with their Afghan counterparts to set the stage for a strategic relationship beyond 2014. From the outset, President Karzai refused to sign anything until Kabul assumed responsibility for all U.S. detention centers and coalition forces ended their night raids. After more than a year of fruitless discussion, a breakthrough came in March 2012. The memorandum of understanding, signed by General Allen and Afghan defense minister Abdul Rahim Wardak, immediately placed an Afghan official in charge of the U.S. Detention Facility in Parwan but allowed Americans to transfer custody of their detainees over a six-month period. A short time later, the United States also ceded control of night raids and other special operations to Afghan forces, while the coalition adopted a supporting role.

With mutually satisfactory detention center and night raid arrangements in place, Obama and Karzai signed the Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement on May 1, 2012. The agreement allowed the United States to train Afghan forces and target al-Qaeda beyond 2014 without placing specific limits on troop or funding levels. To accomplish those missions, the Afghans provided U.S. personnel access to and use of Afghan facilities through 2014 and beyond. More than two years of follow-on talks were required, however, before the United States and Afghanistan signed a new SOFA in September 2014.

As Afghan and U.S. policymakers worked out major transition and security challenges, CENTCOM initiated a phased reduction of U.S. troop levels. Planners at U.S. Forces–Afghanistan divided the drawdown into two main stages. The first consisted of pulling out 10,000 troops by the end of 2011, leaving 91,000 U.S. servicemembers in Afghanistan. The second stage involved redeploying another 33,000 troops by the end of September 2012. The downsizing of equipment stocks required logisticians to determine what equipment should be shipped out, turned over to the Afghans, or discarded. Each course of action involved different sets of personnel. Items slated for shipment out of theater became the responsibility of transporters, while supply specialists turned over equipment to the Afghans.

Items identified for disposal were fed into industrial shredders or cut apart by teams of contractors armed with plasma torches. The entire process required multiple tracking systems to monitor, oversee, and record the final disposition of the items in question.

On September 29, 2011, the initial estimate of equipment for disposition was 26,000 vehicles and 1.8 million pieces of nonrolling stock. Cost estimates valued that materiel at \$17 billion and predicted it would cost \$6 billion to remove it. A more detailed survey completed several months later placed the value of items at \$25 billion while relocation costs ballooned to \$10 billion. Armed with updated figures, ISAF calculated that it had to ship out 1,200 vehicles and 1,000 containers each month starting in October 2011 in order to meet the December 31, 2014, deadline.

Unanticipated developments, however, threatened to stall the retrograde. On the night of November 25–26, 2011, an ANA commando unit, aided by fourteen U.S. Special Forces soldiers, targeted a Taliban cell near the border with Pakistan. Soon after Afghan and U.S. forces landed from helicopters near their objective, they came under machine-gun and mortar fire from positions on a ridgeline in Pakistan. Given their proximity to the border, the troops on the ground initially requested a show of force. However, the unidentified force continued targeting the Afghan and U.S. forces after a low-level pass by an F-15E Strike Eagle. In response, an AC-130 gunship and AH-64D Apache helicopters engaged the assailants. The engagement ended after ISAF belatedly confirmed that Pakistani military forces were firing on coalition personnel.

The incident triggered claims and counterclaims by all three nations. In addition to launching accusations at Washington, Islamabad ordered CIA drone operators to leave Shamsi Airbase, which had been a vital location for surveillance operations. Seeking to disrupt ISAF day-to-day operations as much as possible, the Pakistani government also shut down the roads running through the Khyber Pass that led to the port of Karachi. Severing the coalition's ground routes through Pakistan posed a tremendous challenge, as nearly 40 percent of logistical traffic utilized those roads. Their closure forced ISAF to rely on airlifts to meet its timetable. Fortunately, the air bridge and northern ground routes sufficed, albeit at much greater cost, to support the retrograde, the transfer of security responsibilities, and the day-to-day operations until the Pakistani government reopened the route more than half a year later on July 3, 2012.



Paratroopers gathering equipment before boarding a CH-47F Chinook for an air assault mission.

THE ANSF AND THE CULMINATION OF INTEQUAL

By September 21, 2012, U.S. Forces–Afghanistan succeeded in reducing its strength to 68,000. The 33,000 American troops withdrawn over

the past year came from everywhere but RC-East. Those reductions included six army brigades, five marine battalions, elements of a combat aviation brigade, and headquarters staff. In addition, ISAF contributors such as Canada, France, and the Netherlands had withdrawn all their troops from Afghanistan or replaced combat units with much smaller numbers of advisers dedicated to training Afghan soldiers and police. The drawdown continued as scheduled during the first half of 2013. On February 10, 2013, marine General Joseph F. Dunford Jr. assumed command of the ISAF from General Allen. On June 18, the Afghan military and police assumed responsibility for securing their entire country. Although the ANA never matched the tactical aptitude of ISAF, its performance was strong enough to force the Taliban to continue relying on indirect methods such as IEDs and suicide bombers. Afghan government security forces suffered more killed and wounded than in previous years, but no ANA unit collapsed in battle, and recruiting goals continued to be met despite rising personnel attrition and an absence of coalition advisers at the brigade and battalion levels.

The final phase of the Afghan retrograde, known as Operation DRUMBEAT, began in mid-2013. Before that time, the United States had reduced its force strength to 68,000 personnel simply by allowing entire units to redeploy without being replaced. Several new considerations, however, influenced plans to reduce U.S. forces to 34,000. First, American and coalition forces had to retain enough advisory capacity to ensure that the ANSF would be tactically successful. Second, organizations with countrywide command and control or logistical responsibilities had to be reduced in size. Finally, units slated for the force that would remain in Afghanistan after December 31, 2014, still required oversight and sustainment from local support units and installations. From the start of Operation DRUMBEAT to the end of February 2014, logisticians succeeded in meeting all of the goals set by Dunford's staff. U.S. Forces–Afghanistan and ISAF shuttered 70 of the remaining 158 bases. Closing bases required removing all buildings, eliminating all explosive material, and remediating all environmental hazards. In addition, ISAF redeployed, retrograded, or divested 11,600 pieces of rolling stock and 2,900 containers of other equipment.

THE FINAL YEAR IN AFGHANISTAN

The Afghan presidential and provincial council elections on April 5, 2014, were the biggest tests that the ANSF faced that year. Although numerous minor incidents occurred on that day, Afghan government forces prevented the Taliban from launching a major attack. Yet even though the insurgents had not been able to disrupt polling, problems soon arose. Neither of the leading presidential candidates, Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, secured enough votes to declare victory, prompting a runoff election in June 2014. Although reports of irregularities voided the runoff, the Afghan Independent Election Commission declared Ghani as Hamid Karzai's official successor on September 21. That same day, Ghani formed a national unity government with Abdullah Abdullah holding the newly created post of chief executive. Throughout the process, U.S. forces limited their involvement to transporting ballots to an audit location where the ANSF provided security for the actual counting.

America's senior commander in Afghanistan changed for the last time when Army General John F. Campbell replaced Dunford on August 26, 2014. For the next several months, Campbell guided ENDURING FREEDOM along the established glide path toward Operation RESOLUTE SUPPORT. A total of 12,700 personnel—9,800 Americans and 2,900 NATO soldiers—were to remain beyond December 31 in a few key areas, including Kabul, Jalalabad, Bagram, Mazar-e Sharif, Herat, and Kandahar. On December 28, General Campbell presided over a ceremony symbolizing the end of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM and the beginning of RESOLUTE SUPPORT. The speakers included Afghan national security advisor Mohammad Hanif Atmar, who acknowledged past sacrifices: “We recognize that you carried on the fight for us when we were not ready. . . . We pray for the fallen, for your sons and daughters who died on our soil.” As Operation ENDURING FREEDOM ended after more than thirteen years, President Obama reminded Americans: “Our personnel will continue to face risks, but this reflects the enduring commitment of the United States to the Afghan people and to a united, secure, and sovereign Afghanistan that is never again used as a source of attacks against our nation.”

RETURN TO EUROPE

The Obama administration halted the planned drawdown of U.S. forces in Europe during 2014 due to rising tensions in that region. These developments stemmed indirectly from dramatic changes to the geopolitical face of post-Cold War Europe: between 1999 and 2009, ten former Soviet republics and satellite states and two countries that had been part of the former Yugoslavia joined NATO. (Montenegro, also part of the former Yugoslavia, would join NATO in 2017.) In response to what Moscow viewed as Western encroachment on its traditional sphere of influence, Russian policymakers adopted a “near abroad” approach intended to reassert influence over the remaining nonaligned republics of the former Soviet Union. Russia's new tactics first emerged in April 2007, after it felt slighted by NATO member state Estonia's refusal to allow it to build a natural gas pipeline to Germany across Estonian territory. When the Estonian government subsequently removed and relocated a controversial statue known as the Bronze Soldier—a Soviet World War II memorial in the center of Tallinn—Moscow-sponsored Estonian youth groups, aided by Russian covert military units, staged several nights of rioting and civil unrest throughout the capital. In the wake of “Bronze Night,” Russian computer hackers also launched wide-ranging cyberattacks on Estonian political, media, and financial targets. Estonian pleas for support went unanswered because at that time NATO did not consider cyberattacks, denial of accessibility to services, or threats to economic security as state-on-state warfare. Although the Russian Federation failed to gain approval for the pipeline, the crisis revealed its willingness to use covert means to attain strategic objectives.

In August 2008, Moscow again used a blend of new methods and more traditional means to launch a military offensive into two pro-Russian regions in neighboring Georgia: South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The Georgian military tried to suppress violent separatism stirred up by Federation agents, but the conflict escalated when Russian troops intervened. After a brief period of consolidation in the breakaway provinces, Russian troops



U.S. Strykers crossing a temporary bridge during a NATO Battle Group exercise in Lithuania.

pushed deeper into Georgia, stopping just short of the capital of Tbilisi and transnational oil pipelines to avoid a confrontation with Western powers. With no prospect of outside intervention, the Georgian government negotiated peace terms favorable to Moscow, which included unilateral recognition of South Ossetia's and Abkhazia's independence. This led NATO to reconsider its offer of membership to Georgia in order to avoid antagonizing the Russian Federation.

In early 2014, Ukraine provided Western observers with yet another example of Moscow's near-abroad policy. Soon after the Ukrainians deposed their corrupt pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich in February, covert Russian special operations units, paramilitary elements, and

armed civilians began infiltrating into Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula, a long-standing point of contention in Russian-Ukrainian relations. In early March, pro-Russian Ukrainians ousted unresisting government troops from their Crimean bases, and within days the newly installed Russian-supported government in Crimea held a referendum in which the majority of residents voted to rejoin the Russian Federation. Not long after Russia annexed Crimea, NATO concerns of Moscow's near-abroad encroachment grew as fighting between Ukrainian troops and pro-Russian separatists erupted in the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine.

At the NATO-Russia Council meeting in April 2014, the alliance's foreign ministers condemned Russian military intervention and suspended staff-level meetings with Moscow. A few days afterward, the 173d Airborne Brigade Combat Team deployed a battalion task force augmented by a forward support company to Poland. Upon arrival, the task force successively detached one rifle company each to Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia for ninety days. Apart from serving as a symbolic deterrent to further Russian adventurism, the initial U.S. deployment to Eastern Europe established the contacts necessary to support and strengthen future security relationships.

Recognizing that the U.S. military presence in Europe needed to be rejuvenated in order to deter Russian expansionism, on June 2, 2014, President Obama signaled a renewed commitment to European security during a meeting of NATO heads of state in Warsaw when he unveiled his European Reassurance Initiative (ERI). The initiative allocated almost \$1 billion in overseas contingency dollars to fund regular rotations of American troops to Europe, build new logistics facilities and pre-positioned equipment sites, and pay for greater American participation in NATO-led exercises. The Obama administration chose to rotate troops to Europe, rather than permanently station them overseas, to avoid the financial and political costs of housing and supporting more troops and their dependents in Europe. Having discarded the permanent basing option, in 2015 the United States established a bilateral security arrange-

PRE-POSITIONED EQUIPMENT STORAGE

In an effort to accelerate the flow of stateside-based units to Germany during the Cold War, the Army began storing equipment in West Germany during the 1960s. Stateside-based American divisions taking part in subsequent NATO exercises drew their equipment from these sites each year. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Army shifted most of that equipment to other regions, including the Middle East, Asia, and the Indian and Pacific ocean regions. After fighting broke out between Ukraine and Russia in 2014, the Army relied on ad hoc “activity sets” until new pre-positioned equipment sites were built.



ment known as Operation ATLANTIC RESOLVE, in which American ground forces would rotate through Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. Within a year, other NATO countries would implement a similar program known as the Enhanced Forward Presence initiative. ERI's funding grew in subsequent years as the United States reaffirmed its determination to bolster NATO and deter further Russian adventurism.

ERI's implementation placed the Army in an awkward position. At the time of President Obama's announcement, U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) numbered only 30,000 soldiers assigned to a Stryker cavalry regiment, airborne brigade combat team, theater sustainment command, signal command, aviation and military police brigades, and pre-positioned equipment stocks sufficient for a single maneuver battalion task force. Over the previous decade, drawdowns had eliminated every intermediate headquarters between army and brigade levels. In addition to significantly reduced numbers, since 2001 individual and unit training in USAREUR had focused on counterinsurgency rather than conventional warfare. To make matters more challenging, the Army had withdrawn all M1A2 Abrams main battle tanks and M2/M3 Bradley fighting vehicles from Europe following a reorganization of global equipment stocks. Acknowledging that considerable preparations were needed before sizable numbers of American soldiers returned to Europe, initial Army efforts were limited to deploying stateside-based battalions for ninety-day rotations. In September 2014, two mechanized battalions from the 1st Cavalry Division replaced 173d Airborne Brigade



Soldiers in Darmstadt, Germany, loading equipment for a joint task force training exercise in Romania.

Combat Team soldiers deployed in Eastern Europe. The stateside units had to bring equipment from their home stations because USAREUR had no pre-positioned stocks of armored fighting vehicles. In addition to the incoming rotational forces, one hundred soldiers from the 4th Infantry Division arrived at Baumholder, Germany, in February 2015 to serve as the ATLANTIC RESOLVE headquarters element.

Rather than follow up the 1st Cavalry Division deployment with other stateside units, USAREUR called upon the 173d Airborne Brigade Combat Team and the Germany-based 2d Cavalry Regiment. The lack of pre-positioned equipment played a key role in that decision. In fact, the duration, scope, and frequency of U.S. rotations for the next eighteen months

were driven by availability of pre-positioned equipment, limited initially to a single battalion set at Grafenwöhr, Germany. An additional equipment site became available when the United States received permission to delay turning over Coleman Barracks in Mannheim to the Germans. However, Mannheim offered only temporary relief to a growing challenge, especially after Bulgaria and Romania joined Operation ATLANTIC RESOLVE in March 2015.

ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL JAMES C. MCCONVILLE (1959–)

General McConville became the 40th Chief of Staff of the Army on August 9, 2019. An aviator, he commanded the 101st Airborne Division and Combined Joint Task Force 101 in Afghanistan. He also has been a brigade, squadron, and troop commander as well as Army G-1 and chief of legislative liaison. Most recently, he was vice chief of staff at a time of great change in the Army with the advent of Futures Command and a renewed focus on modernization. His three children also serve in the military.



Larger unit rotations began in September 2015 with the arrival of the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division, from Fort Stewart, Georgia. The brigade drew equipment from Grafenwöhr and Mannheim before moving to training areas in Eastern Europe. In addition, the 3d Infantry Division sent a battalion of UH-60 Black Hawks to augment the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade stationed in Germany. The aviation unit remained for nine months while its ground counterpart departed after a three-month deployment. When the armor brigade combat team redeployed, it returned borrowed equipment not only to sites in Germany but also to temporary equipment storage sites in Bulgaria, Lithuania, and Romania. Because of the pressing need to upgrade the temporary sites, the rotational period for the next iteration of ground units (drawn primarily from the 2d Cavalry Regiment) increased from three to six months in early 2016.

The ERI experienced considerable turbulence over the next year as ad hoc measures gave way to permanent arrangements. Just before the end of 2016, the U.S. European Command (EUCOM) closed Grafenwöhr and Mannheim after completing state-of-the-art storage sites at Egelshoven, the Netherlands; Zutendaal, Belgium; and Miesau and Dülmen in northern Germany. In addition to supporting armor brigade combat team rotations, the facilities held equipment for a field artillery brigade and a division headquarters. The inaugural nine-month ground deployment began when the 3d Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, arrived at Bremerhaven, Germany, in early January 2017. The first overlapping deployments of combat aviation brigades took place two months later with the arrival of the 10th Mountain Division's helicopter fleet, accompanied by an AH-64 battalion from Fort Hood, Texas. In September 2017, the second nine-month rotational unit, 2d Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, arrived in Poland. On September 29, the forward-deployed 4th Infantry Division staff members handed over their responsibilities to the 1st Infantry Division soon afterward. The commitment of U.S. forces not only infused a new sense of purpose among the members of the NATO alliance in the wake of the Afghan conflict, but also strengthened Western Europe's ability to curb Russia's near-abroad policy.

FIGHTING ISIS IN IRAQ AND SYRIA

In January 2011, few Americans would have predicted that U.S. ground troops and airpower would return to Iraq within a little more than three years. Perhaps even more disconcerting, returning American forces would battle opponents that traced their lineage back to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's al-Qaeda in Iraq. That once-defunct group, now dubbed the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), had resurrected itself by capitalizing on the dissatisfaction created by Prime Minister al-Maliki's Shia-dominated government. ISIS succeeded not only in gaining traction among Sunni tribes that previously opposed al-Qaeda in Iraq, but also attracted former Iraqi military officers, who transformed it into a fighting force numbering 30,000 or more. In mid-2014, ISIS launched a series of major attacks that scattered several Iraqi Army divisions while carving out a swath of land the size of England in Syria and northwestern Iraq.

The decision to send American troops back to Iraq had several sources. First, the bloody excesses that ISIS carried out in the wake of its initial victories drew increased U.S. and international attention to Iraq's

political problems, as well as to the civil war in Syria that had been raging since 2011. Second, the Iranian government sent an influx of support for the al-Maliki regime, including a contingent of senior officials, an intelligence-gathering unit equipped with drones and signal intercept equipment, special operations units, volunteers drawn from Iranian regular units, and Sukhoi Su-25 “Frogfoot” ground attack aircraft. This Iranian intervention raised legitimate concerns about Tehran’s long-term aspirations in Iraq. Not content with confining its activities to the Middle East, ISIS also exported its violent agenda to Europe and the United States, where terrorist attacks ranging from shootings and stabbings to suicide bombings at airports claimed hundreds of lives. Finally, the appointment of Haider al-Abadi as the new Iraqi prime minister on August 11 eliminated concerns among Western nations that had been reluctant to publicly support al-Maliki’s repressive government.

The Obama administration’s opening moves in Iraq took place on August 8, 2014, when American jets bombed ISIS fighters advancing on Erbil from the west. The intervention proved both timely and substantive, as air attacks played a significant role later that month in the defeat of an ISIS force besieging the Shia Turkmen town of Amerli, north of Baghdad. Just before committing airpower, the United States sent Company B, 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, to bolster security at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad in case of a potential evacuation, and dispatched Special Forces detachments to assess the state of Iraqi security forces while also collecting targeting information for future bombing attacks by establishing joint operations centers in Baghdad and northeastern Iraq.

On September 10, President Obama announced his administration’s counter-ISIS strategy to the American people: “ISIS poses an immediate threat to the people of Iraq and the people throughout the region. And that’s why our military action in Iraq has to be part of a broader, comprehensive strategy to protect our people and to support our partners who are taking the fight to ISIS.” He sought to allay fears about potential escalation by stating that large numbers of American ground troops would not return to the region. One week later, the DOD designated Maj. Gen. Paul E. Funk II’s 1st Infantry Division at Fort Riley as the Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command–Iraq (CJFLCC-I) responsible for tactical training and support of Iraqi forces. Several hundred Special Forces personnel deployed soon afterward to Syria to train and equip opposition groups battling ISIS. The operational-level command and control for the campaign was established on October 17, when Lt. Gen. James L. Terry’s U.S. Army Central (USARCENT) headquarters at Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina, became Combined Joint Task Force–Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (CJTF-OIR).

TRAINING AND ASSISTANCE

In addition to overseeing American air, naval, and ground components taking part in the fight against ISIS, CJTF-OIR became the focal point for synchronizing and integrating the efforts of forty nations contributing military contingents to the unfolding campaign. The three initial priorities of Terry’s headquarters were to coordinate air and ground combat operations to degrade and defeat ISIS; build and maintain the coalition, including security force assistance; and contribute to the broader diplomatic, intelligence, and economic efforts to overcome ISIS.

To accomplish those tasks, the Pentagon provided Terry with personnel for the CJTF-OIR headquarters and 1,500 U.S. trainers to rebuild the Iraqi security forces. The initial contingent of trainers, drawn from the 3d Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division, and 310th Sustainment Command for a nine-month tour of duty, deployed in early 2015 to Camp Taji, twenty-seven kilometers north of Baghdad. CJTF-OIR selected Taji, with Baghdad's concurrence, because it offered adequate facilities and easy access to the Iraqi Army's main logistical hub. Along with providing force protection to the installation, the coalition advisers and trainers of Task Group Taji oversaw sustainment-related instruction, a six-week basic infantry course, and three weeks of advanced training. In the next several months, the training effort branched out from Taji to other locations, accommodating up to 3,500 trainees at the same time.

General Funk's staff returned to Fort Riley in late June when Maj. Gen. Richard D. Clarke's 82d Airborne Division headquarters assumed responsibility for CJFLCC-I. At the time of the handover, approximately 3,550 U.S. servicemembers and 1,500 coalition personnel aided the fight against ISIS. The first rotation of trainers came three months later, when 1,250 soldiers from the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, arrived for a nine-month deployment split between Taji and Erbil in northern Iraq. Unlike their predecessors, who had not had time for intense predeployment training, the Fort Drum soldiers received several months of specialized instruction before they left for Iraq.

On September 22, 2015, Lt. Gen. Sean B. MacFarland's III Corps assumed authority of CJTF-OIR from USARCENT. MacFarland's new orders included expanding airstrikes from tactical and leadership targets to include illicit commercial enterprises controlled by ISIS. In response, CJTF-OIR initiated Operation TIDAL WAVE II (named after the American aerial attack on the oil fields of Nazi-allied Romania in 1943) in order to deprive ISIS of funding by attacking oil collection facilities and tanker convoys under its control. Decreased funding would not only hamper ISIS's ability to procure equipment, but also prevent its recruiters from using lucrative cash incentives to attract new fighters to its ranks.

MacFarland's geographical priorities also shifted from safeguarding Baghdad to preventing ISIS expansion in western Iraq. As early as January 2014, ISIS had established a partial foothold in Ar Ramadi, the capital of Iraq's Sunni-dominated Al Anbar Province, and in June 2015, after seventeen months of fighting against Iraqi government forces, ISIS took full control of the city. The Baghdad government quickly began making plans to regain control of Ar Ramadi. As a result, MacFarland shifted the advise-and-assist focus from defensive to offensive tasks, which meant that the III Corps had to establish additional training sites to accommodate the greater influx of trainees for offensive operations. In addition to training Iraqi army and police recruits, MacFarland's staff began working with tribal irregulars seeking to free their ancestral lands from ISIS control.

Developments in western Iraq revealed that airpower could not provide timely support to counterattacking Iraqi forces. To support the Ar Ramadi counteroffensive, CENTCOM deployed elements of a Fort Sill-based M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) field artillery battalion. Unlike warplanes and drones, HIMARS systems could engage targets on short notice during sandstorms and rain and under cloudy conditions. Its rocket warheads carried a small but effective



U.S. Army soldiers discussing operations against ISIS with Iraqi Army division leaders.

explosive charge, useful in situations where friendly troops were close to the target. Operated from locations within Iraq, rather than bases elsewhere in the region, the commitment of HIMARS was a little-noticed escalation in the U.S.-led effort against ISIS.

Amid the combined Iraqi-American operations to liberate Ar Ramadi, Russia deployed troops to prop up the embattled regime of Syria's President Bashar al-Assad. In 2011, popular backlash against Assad's repressive policies sparked a civil war in which Syrian government forces, opponents of the regime, and Islamist extremists all committed atrocities and created refugees, with little sign of finding a political solution to the conflict. Although Moscow claimed that it had sent troops to take part in the fight

against ISIS, Russian forces attacked Syrian antigovernment fighters twice as often as they targeted extremist fighters. To further complicate matters, Russian business conglomerates with interests in Syria hired mercenaries to retake oil refineries and other industries under extremist control. U.S. and Russian conventional forces managed to avoid an inadvertent clash, but American airstrikes killed or wounded several hundred mercenaries in February 2018 when pro-Assad forces attacked U.S. Special Forces personnel in the eastern Syrian province of Dayr Az Zawr.

M142 HIMARS

The M142 HIMARS is a truck-mounted version of the tracked M270 MLRS, capable of being carried via C-130 transport aircraft. It fires the same rockets, but does not have as many launching tubes. The HIMARS employs the entire range of 227-mm. rockets produced for the M270 system, as well as the Army Tactical Missile System.



Coalition gains in western Iraq stifled some of the early concerns that followed Russian intervention in the region. With CJTF-OIR's operational support, an Iraqi task force of 10,000 police, counterterrorism troops, and tribal militiamen moved back into parts of Ar Ramadi's urban center as early as October 2015. After weeks of intense fighting, the Iraqi troops declared victory in December. Although forces loyal to Baghdad prevailed, the battle for Ar Ramadi destroyed much of the city's vital infrastructure, including every bridge over the Euphrates River. During the final months of 2015, coalition ground and air forces recovered almost 29,000 total square kilometers, almost half of ISIS's territorial conquests in Iraq and 20 percent of what it controlled in Syria (*Map 44*).

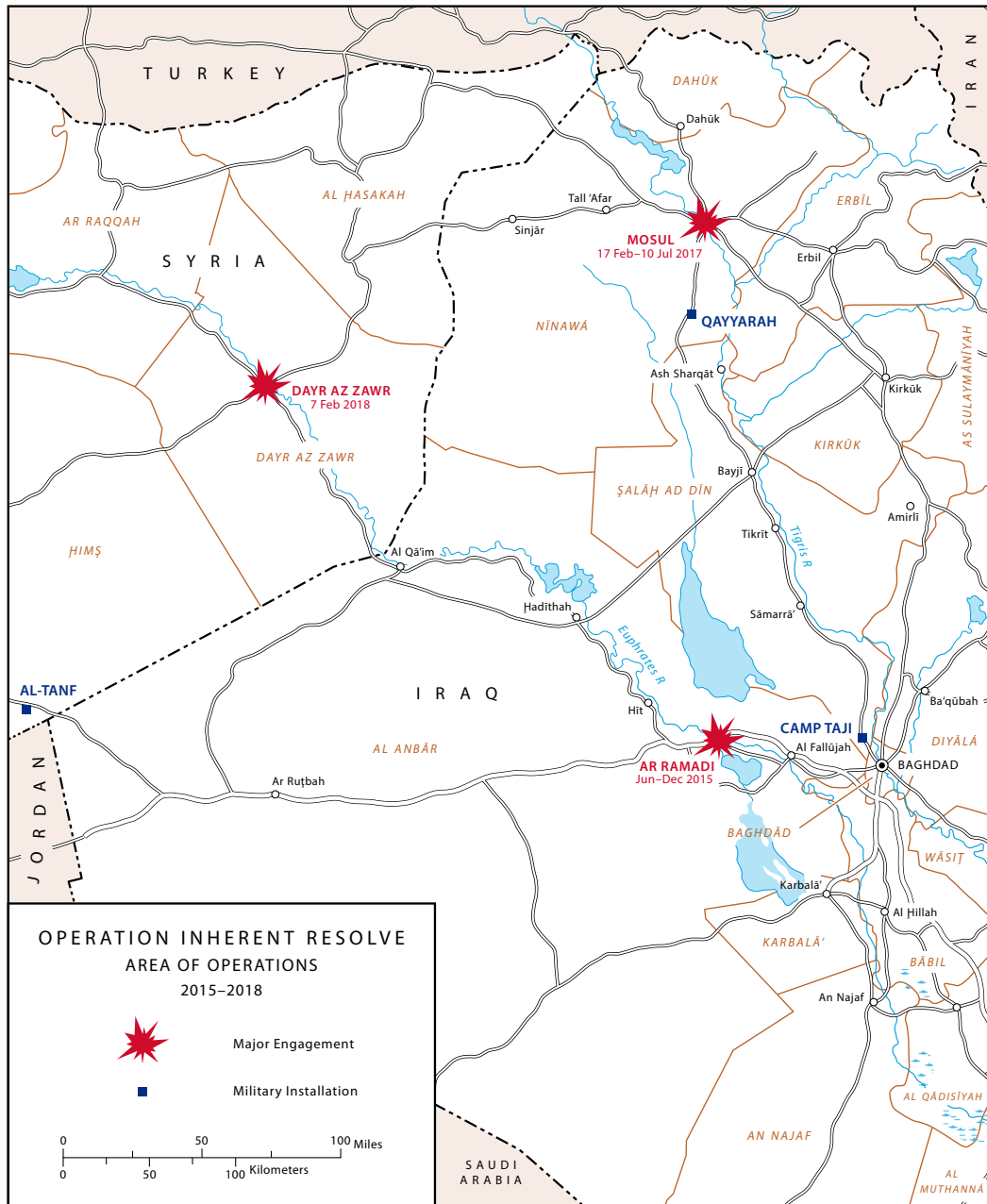
In March 2016, Maj. Gen. Gary J. Volesky's 101st Airborne Division replaced the 82d Airborne Division headquarters as CJFLCC-I. Volesky's arrival coincided with the deployment of a HIMARS battery to Jordan in support of Syrian fighters battling ISIS. The battery's initial strikes targeted an ISIS base near the city of al-Tanf, where the borders of Syria, Iraq, and Jordan converge. Al-Tanf, which connected ISIS-held territories in Syria and Iraq, had been controlled by the extremists since May 2015. In addition to the Jordan-based HIMARS unit, CJFLCC-I sent a second HIMARS battery to Turkey and a marine 155-mm. howitzer unit to Syria, both of which provided support for Syria's anti-ISIS groups.

FROM TRAIN AND ASSIST TO BATTLEFIELD ADVISING

The employment of artillery and rocket systems, augmented by armed drones flown by Army personnel, expanded the American conventional footprint in the region. As the Iraqis continued to liberate areas in northern and western Iraq in anticipation of a drive on Mosul, CJFLCC-I established additional coordination cells with key Iraqi headquarters. The cells were distributed among four major operations centers, five strategic locations (including Baghdad and Erbil), three federal police divisions, and some of the paramilitary groups that sprang up in the wake of ISIS's invasion. The coordination cells exchanged information with their Iraqi counterparts, such as data that General Volesky's fires cell used to identify targets for HIMARS and unmanned aerial vehicle (drone) strikes.

Aiding the opening stage of the fight for Mosul was Lt. Gen. Stephen J. Townsend's XVIII Airborne Corps, which assumed command of CJTF-OIR from the III Corps on August 21, 2016. Before the XVIII Airborne Corps arrived, Iraqi security forces recaptured several major urban areas to the south and southwest of Mosul, including Hit, Al Fallujah, and Ash Sharqat. In some instances, ISIS forces abandoned the towns without putting up a fight. Four days after Townsend took command, Iraqi troops and police gained a foothold within striking distance of Mosul by seizing the airfield at Qayyarah. Recognizing that the upcoming fight would be intense and sustained, Townsend began building up a support base at Qayyarah to reposition American assets on the outskirts of the northern Iraqi city.

Iraqi forces, along with coalition fires, air support, and targeting teams, began probing Mosul on October 17. The fighting revealed that ISIS had made good use of the past two years to prepare its defenses. The Americans and the Iraqis, well aware that liberating Mosul would require far more troops and resources than earlier efforts, paused the campaign for several months. CJTF-OIR supported a postponement until CJFLCC-I



Map 44

transitioned and advisory teams had embedded within Iraqi Army units. Officials in Baghdad calculated that they would have to deploy up to 65,000 soldiers and police to defeat 5,000 to 10,000 ISIS defenders. The Ministry of Defense in Baghdad accordingly assembled a multicomponent force of overwhelming strength in order to guarantee ISIS's defeat. Incoming U.S. reinforcements included attack aviation units to provide convoy security, 155-mm. M109A6 Paladin self-propelled howitzers from the 1st Cavalry Division, and tactical advisory teams from Col. J. Patrick Work's 2d Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division. As the additional troops occu-

OPENING COMBAT POSITIONS TO WOMEN

In 2013, after more than a decade of conflict in which both male and female personnel were exposed to enemy fire on a daily basis, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta rescinded the 1994 Pentagon policy barring women from serving in combat. The Pentagon then spent almost three years determining which combat specialties should be open to women. On December 2, 2015, Panetta's successor, Ashton B. Carter, announced that women could now compete for 138,000 combat-coded Army duty positions. The landmark decision came three months after the first female soldiers graduated from the Army's elite Ranger School.



pied forward operating bases on the southern periphery of the city, Maj. Gen. Joseph M. Martin's 1st Infantry Division took control of CJFLCC-I on November 17.

The Iraqi government's own preparations also required several months to complete. Government forces assembled for the battle included about 35,000 soldiers (7th Infantry Division; parts of the 8th, 10th, 15th, and 16th Infantry Divisions; and elements from the 9th Armored Division), 8,000 personnel from the Commando and Antiterrorism "Golden" Division, and 8,000 members of the Iraqi National Police. In addition, Baghdad persuaded almost 50,000 Shia militia, Assyrian and Turkmen irregulars, and Kurdish fighters to assist government troops. In the final plan, the combined forces would assault Mosul from the north, northwest, and south, while the militia isolated the city to the east and northeast.

Once all of the participating formations were in place, the Iraqi Army opened the offensive in late February 2017 with a northward push along the Tigris River to capture the high ground overlooking the western half of Mosul. After securing the heights, Iraqi security forces captured the international airport after several days of hard fighting. The seizure of the airport allowed coalition forces to fly in reinforcements and supplies. After a brief pause in early March to allow Iraqi combat engineers to construct mobile bridges across the Tigris River, the attackers surged



Iraqi National Police on guard during the battle to liberate West Mosul in July 2017.

into the eastern half of the city where fighting continued through June. Prime Minister al-Abadi declared Mosul liberated on July 10, 2017.

Although government forces had recaptured the second-largest city in Iraq, fighting against extremist remnants continued until Baghdad declared complete victory over ISIS in December. Most of the American servicemembers taking part in the campaign left Iraq, with 4,000 remaining to continue the training mission established at Camp Taji in early 2015. ISIS's expulsion from Iraq, however, did not herald its demise. Deprived of safe havens in Iraq and Syria, its surviving leadership relocated to Afghanistan ("Khurasan," in ISIS terminology) and Western Africa (the Sahel area), where they began rebuilding their ranks.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. American troops withdrew from Iraq in 2011. The drawdown of U.S. forces from Afghanistan happened in 2014. How were these events the same and how did they differ? Which proved more difficult to plan and execute?

2. How well did the Army manage internal organizational change following the end of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts? Did senior Army leaders correctly emphasize the necessary changes, given the influences of significant fiscal constraints and the global strategic situation? What would you have done differently?

3. Do you believe that American strategic interests in Europe are best served by rotational forces, units permanently stationed in the region, or a mix of both options? What are the pros and cons of permanently stationing units in Europe? What readiness benefits do stateside-based units gain when rotating to Europe every three to four years?

4. Does the Army have a prominent place in American defense strategy for the Pacific Region given its past focus on Europe? If so, how can land forces exert a significant deterrent influence in what traditionally has been a maritime-focused strategic environment? Do you agree with that general overall description of the Pacific Region?

5. In your opinion, did the counter-ISIS strategy adopted in Iraq and Syria evolve in logical manner? How did the following factors—domestic politics, international politics, military tactics, security force assistance requirements, and enemy situation—influence its evolution? How would you rate the overall effectiveness of that strategy? Do you think that events made a stronger case for the commitment of U.S. ground forces or is air-power alone sufficient to meet American strategic aims in some situations?

6. Do the continental European members of the NATO alliance have the will and military capabilities to deter further expansion by the Russian Federation? How essential are United States and British participation in

the alliance? Can NATO alliance's overall framework remain the same, or should it undergo major internal changes as its geographical center of gravity shifts eastward from northwest Europe and the Mediterranean?

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